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CHAPTER I.

A SECRET EXPEDITION.

A SMALL schooner, that had the appearance of a coaster, or pilot-boat, was cruising slowly along the coast of England, and keeping close inshore, as though it was the intention of her skipper to seek a haven for the night, for the sun was nearing the western horizon.

Upon her deck were but half a dozen people, four of them forward, and two aft, one of the latter being at the helm, while the other stood gazing listlessly over the waters.

The two were as different in appearance as daylight and darkness, the helmsman a rugged old sea-dog, grizzled-bearded, cunning faced, and one who had evidently been nearly half a century upon the ocean.

The other was a youth, tall, slender, but sinewy, with a face that was strikingly handsome, and yet marred by a certain look of evil that rested upon it.

He was neatly dressed in sailor pants, pea-jacket and cap, and wore a diamond pin in his black silk scarf, and a ruby of considerable value upon the little finger of his left hand.

There was about him the air of one who passed his days in idleness, and yet was capable of great exertion if driven to it, while he looked like a younger son of some noble family, one whom luck had gone against.

The men forward were evidently the crew of the little schooner, and a hardy, bold set of sailors that seemed willing to go wherever the winds wafted them without a murmur.

The craft was a stanch one, long, low and lean in hull, drawing considerable water, and spreading more canvas than one would believe possible for one of her tonnage.

"There is the mansion, Sport," said the helmsman, addressing the youth, and pointing to the snowy walls of a villa that just then became visible, as the schooner rounded a point of land.

The youth turned listlessly and fixed his gaze upon the mansion, which soon loomed up grandly, presenting the appearance of being the home of wealth and refinement, surrounded as it was with superb parks, ornamental grounds and flower-gardens.

The grounds led down to the shore of a small bay, wherein were anchored several pleasure craft, and at the end of a pier, jutting some distance out into the water, was a handsome pavilion.

As the schooner rounded the point and headed into the little harbor, a man was seen to come out upon the piazza of the mansion and turn a spy-glass upon the incoming craft.

A moment he stood watching her, and then, glass in hand, he descended the broad steps and started leisurely toward the shore.

He was a man of forty, and perhaps older, though he did not look it.

His hair was black, and he wore a mustache, which gave him a foreign look, for beard was not worn in England in those early days.

His appearance was *distingue*, his bearing erect, and his face full of conscious power, though a face to fear rather than love.

Dressed in the height of fashion of that period, he strode leisurely along, and reached the pavilion on the end of the pier just as the schooner luffed up and dropped anchor, about a cable's length distant.

"It is my man," he muttered; and after an instant, added:

"But he has chosen a small craft for a long ocean voyage, yet she looks like a good sea-boat."

As he gazed upon the schooner, with evidently a seaman's admiration at her good points, the helmsman sprang into a small boat and sculled himself rapidly shoreward.

Seeing his approach, the one on the pier stepped back into the interior of the pavilion and there awaited his coming, seating himself upon a rustic settee and assuming the air of one who felt no interest in the arrival of the stranger.

"Well, my lord, here I am," said the sailor bluntly, as he sprang out of his boat and stepped into the pavilion.

"So I see, Bronx; but what luck?"

"I got him."

"Where is he?"

"On board the schooner."

"Will he do?"

"You shall see for yourself, soon as we come to terms, my lord."

"You do not mean to cross the sea in that schooner?"

"None better, my lord, for she's as stiff as a deacon's back, runs like a scared hare, and carries canvas to drive her, if need be."

"I admired her points, but thought her rather small, Bronx."

"She'll do, my lord, and she needs but half a dozen of us to run her, and thus I cut down expenses."

"You save money for yourself, you mean, for I have the same sum to pay as though you had a score of men in your crew."

"Yes, my lord, and you reap largely by my work."

"We will not discuss that, Bronx. You are paid well for your work, and if you are not satisfied, throw up the compact and I'll find some one else."

"I am satisfied, my lord."

"Then be sure to give satisfaction to me, Bronx, by carrying out fully my instructions, and I'll prove my appreciation by a souvenir of gold above the contract."

"I thank you, my lord."

"Now let me see the youth."

"Will you get into my boat and row out to the schooner, my lord?"

"No, for I wish to attract no comment from my servants by such an act; bring the boy ashore."

Bronx sprang into his boat and rowed back to the schooner, soon returning with the youth, whom he had addressed as Sport, seated in the stern.

"My lord, this is the young man of whom I spoke."

"Sport, this is Lord Brandon."

Such was the introduction of Bronx, and while the youth bowed courteously, Lord Brandon slightly bent his haughty head in acknowledgment, and said:

"Captain Bronx tells me you are to take a run across the ocean with him as his mate?"

"Yes, my lord, as matters were not to my taste ashore, I concluded to try the sea again."

"Then you are a sailor?"

"I was a middy in the Royal Navy, my lord."

"Why did you not remain in the service, may I ask?"

"I was ambitious, my lord, and sought to be commander before I had earned my epaulettes, and was consequently sent ashore to rusticate," was the cool response.

"Your name, please?"

"Captain Bronx calls me Sport."

"Well, it matters not, for I know you now, as a middy who planned a mutiny to seize a king's cutter, and would have been hanged but for the intervention of your family."

"You are Ralph Algernon."

"I was, my lord; but since I disgraced my name and family by my act, I have taken my baptismal name of Noble, and my intimates call me Sport, a cognomen by which I prefer to be known."

"Well, I wish you well, my lad, and, for the friendship I hold for Bronx here, who was an old messmate of mine years ago, I give you this little remembrance of me," and Lord Brandon thrust into the youth's hand a silk purse well filled.

Without a blush of shame the young man took the gift, while he said:

"I thank you, my lord; this will serve as a stake to gamble on with the rich Americans."

Lord Brandon did not reply to this remark, but turning to the old sailor said:

"Well, Bronx, farewell, and a speedy and safe voyage to you."

"Thank you, my lord, and good-by, sir."

"Into the boat, Sport."

The youth raised his cap to the nobleman and sprang into the stern, while Bronx asked in a low tone:

"Will he do, my lord?"

"Wonderfully well."

"You could not have made a better choice."

"I am glad you are pleased, my lord."

"Good-by, and expect me to bring you good news."

"Ay, ay, Bronx, I shall expect nothing else," was the response of Lord Brandon, as the old sailor seized the oars and pulled rapidly away from the pier.

Reaching the schooner, the anchor was gotten up, the sails were set, and in the gathering gloom the little vessel stood seaward, the nobleman standing upon the pier and watching her until she faded from his view far out upon the waters.

Then he turned away and walked slowly toward the mansion, from the windows of which lights were now glimmering, while he muttered to himself:

"That craft carries my hopes."

"If Bronx fails, the end that I have ever dreaded must come."

CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS NOBLE.

LORD BRANDON'S home was one of the grandest in England, and had descended from many generations.

Its outline changed by heir after heir, to suit his whims, there was not much of the old structure left, though one wing had been but little disturbed, and this was the original building.

It was situated upon the gloomy side of the house, overhung by majestic trees; its windows were small and narrow; it possessed a massive basement, two stories and an attic; and yet, though the rooms were large and elegantly furnished, they were never occupied, for even the owner seemed to dread that part of his superb home.

Stories were told that the north wing was haunted.

A murder was known to have been committed there in the long ago, and when any one of the family dwelt there, that one was certain to take ill and die.

Upon taking possession of his inheritance, Lord Brandon had had the haunted wing overhauled, painted, fitted up thoroughly, and furnished extravagantly, and had then made his quarters there.

He had remained but one night, in fact not all of that, for he fled from his bed shortly after midnight and took oath that he would not sleep there again.

What he saw to alarm him, he did not make known, even to his confidential *valet*; only he said he preferred the other wing of the house for his living quarters, and the haunted wing was accordingly closed up.

Lord Brandon had been in possession of his estates but a short time, when he is presented to the reader.

A strange mystery seemed to overhang his life, and he was not loved, but dreaded among his neighbors.

Sea View Villa, as the mansion was called, had been long an object of interest to the country, and strange tales were told of the race who had dwelt there.

Away back its broad acres had belonged to an old farmer, whose wild son had run off and gone to the wars.

Years after he had returned a distinguished soldier, and his king had ennobled him.

From him had descended Lord Brandon, who, before his inheritance of his title and estates had been known as Burke Brandon, and a wild, reckless boy at that, the son of a country prelate.

The direct heir to the estate, Leo Burton Brandon, had been the rival of his cousin, Burke Brandon, for the hand of their cousin, pretty Helen Burke, and she had loved the former, and the two had married recently and fled to America.

But the ship they sailed in went down, and nothing was heard of them more, so Burke Brandon became the heir in place of his cousin, as the next nearest of blood.

But Burke Brandon had been forced to fly, to save his neck from the gibbet, as he had, it was claimed, ruthlessly taken the life of one of his retainers.

After years of absence, and roving no one knew where, Burke Brandon returned, and his story was soon told, how he had, in sorrow for losing his sweet cousin Helen, fled to sea, while the cousin who had married her, was the real murderer of the retainer whom it was said that he had killed.

Several witnesses were brought forward to sustain his story, and Burke Brandon stepped into Sea View Villa as its master.

But it was not very long before his reckless life of dissipation caused him to run through with his money, and mortgage heavily his lands.

Harassed by creditors, and with nothing to live upon, he again fled the country, and it was hoped forever.

Sea View Villa was left in good hands however, and the agent so well managed its affairs, that the many broad acres surrounding the mansion paid off, in a few years the mortgages, and began to hoard up gold for its next lord and master.

After long years had again gone by, Burke Brandon again appeared.

His face was darkly bronzed, his carriage dignified, his manner stern but courtly, and he seemed to have utterly sown his wild oats and become a man whom his neighbors might respect.

Of where he had been he had little to say, other than that he had settled in Cuba and become a sugar-planter, which occupation had amassed for him a large fortune.

He at once did an act of good, which did much to cancel the bad name he had left behind him when he departed, for he built a handsome chapel upon his grounds, near a village, and endowed it with a good living, while he aided the poor of the neighborhood by a liberal donation.

The country nobles and gentry, seeing the change in Lord Brandon called upon him, and he was invited to their homes in return.

But he held himself much aloof, and few of the mansions near did he darken the doors of as a guest.

His stern nature forbade intimacy with any one, and he lived much the life of a recluse.

He had enlarged and improved his mansion, fitted it up superbly, beautified the grounds, added to the park, and surrounded the villa on the sea side with sloping lawns of velvet grass that went to the edge of the little haven.

He had his yachts and row-boats, his horses and hounds, and no one of his wealthy neighbors could live with the extravagance with which he did.

Yet he never now ran in debt, paid promptly for everything, and people felt that he must indeed have made a fabulous fortune in the West Indies to keep up his style of living, for certainly the estate could not support it.

As he would say nothing of his early and later wanderings, people began to look upon him as a man of mystery, and soon he was dubbed by the country folk the "Mysterious Noble."

Such was the man who had met Bronx, the skipper, and who had sent him, with the young ex-middy, Sport, across the Atlantic on a secret service which the story will gradually unfold to the reader.

CHAPTER III.

NICK BURTON THE MIDSHIPMAN.

THERE are no scenes on the American shores, more full of romance, and which have been the theater of more thrilling "deeds of the sea," than the island-dotted waters of the coast of Maine.

From the islands and rivers, the harbors and inlets, the bravest sailors of the deep have gone forth to battle for country and gold.

The swiftest privateers of the war of the Revolution and of 1812, were built by the seamen of Maine, who also manned them, and battled with their foes.

Pirates have had their haunts along these same shores, treasures have been buried upon islands and cliff-heads, outlaws have fled to the isles for safety, hermits have hidden themselves there from the world. Smugglers have had their retreats along the shores, and knowing well the intricate and dangerous channels have

thus escaped their pursuers in the moment when capture seemed assured.

Refugees from foreign lands have made their home along the inhospitable shores, but among the hospitable people, and many old families of the State of Maine to-day, are descendants of exiles from Spain, France and England.

To these scenes I would have my reader accompany, for there the theater of action of my story mostly lies, and some of the characters of my romance are to be found among the dwellers in the fair city of Portland, which though then by no means the place it is to-day, was a commercial mart of considerable importance a hundred years ago, and sent away a stately merchant craft out of its port to trade with other lands, while majestic men-of-war, saucy cutters and rakish privateers made its harbor their resort.

A short time before my story opens, scenes had transpired there among those who will figure in this romance, that had caused considerable excitement among all people, from the highest to the lowest degree.

A gallant youth, known as Light-house Nick, and who dwelt with his widowed mother upon a little island down the coast, upon which stood a light-house, had been accused of leading a pirate captain and his men to attack the home of a wealthy Portland citizen.

This same citizen had been saved, with his daughter and a young school-girl friend, from death by the boy, only a short time before, and also, years before, he had saved the same maiden, then a mere girl, from being killed by a mad-dog.

And yet, brave Light-house Nick had been accused of guiding a pirate to rob the father of the maiden he loved, and made no secret of loving.

In vain did he plead that he knew them not to be pirates, but believed them men-o'-war's men; he was arrested, thrown into jail, tried and sentenced to be hung at the yard-arm.

Rescued in a mysterious way, Light-house Nick had been able to prove his innocence, and returning to Portland, had become the accepted suitor of Ruth Rowland, the maiden whose father he had been accused of leading pirates to rob.

For saving a Government vessel from wreck, he had also received a midshipman's berth on board a schooner-of-war then lying in the harbor, and was acting second in command at the time he was presented to the reader.

The home of Doctor Rowland was the handsomest in the town.

It was situated upon the hill overlooking the harbor, the island-dotted bay and the sea, and its grounds sloped gently down to the water's edge, a small earthen arm there forming a little haven in which were pleasure-craft of all kinds.

Doctor Rufus Rowland was a man of great wealth, and had come to Portland nine years before, accompanied by his only child, Ruth, then a beautiful little girl of twelve.

Of Doctor Rowland's antecedents nothing was known, but he claimed to have come from a Southern State, and his riches caused him to be at once honored, while, an elegant-mannered, handsome man he won popularity and respect.

As for Ruth, no one could see her and not love her, and, from the day she arrived in Portland she became a favorite with all who knew her.

Rumor had it that Doctor Rowland had resented Light-house Nick's refusal of gold for his services to his daughter and himself, and then his love for Ruth, and had been strangely bitter in the prosecution of the youth as a pirate, but when the affair was settled to the honor of Nick, he unbent from his haughty behavior toward the gallant young sailor, and acknowledged him as a suitor for his daughter's hand.

As for Nick he had but little money other than his pay; but he had the courage of a lion, was a perfect seaman; his ambition made him aim for distinction, and he vowed that his sword should make the name of Nick Burton so famous that Doctor Rowland would be glad to bestow upon him his daughter.

At the time of the arrest of Nick as a pirate, his mother, Mrs. Burton, had mysteriously disappeared from her Light-house Island home, and it was believed that the pirates had carried her off, or slain her; but certain it is, though the son's character was proven untarnished, and he was honored by being made a naval officer, his mother's fate still remained a mystery, and this cast a gloom over the noble youth, while he registered an oath to hunt down her kidnappers and rescue her, or if harm had befallen her, to bitterly avenge her.

The schooner of which Nick Burton was second in command, was a pretty, rakish craft of a hundred tons burden, well armed and manned, and one that showed both speed and seaworthy qualities.

Pacing the quarter-deck, gazing shoreward upon the Rowland Manor, at every turn in his walk, was Midshipman Nick Burton.

A slender, but sinewy form, broad shoulders, erect carriage, and handsome, fearless face, he was one to win a maiden's love and command a man's respect.

Suddenly his dark, daring eyes lighted up,

and a smile of pleasure hovered upon his mouth, as he beheld a fair form, clad in white, come out of the Rowland Mansion and walk leisurely down toward the little arbor upon the end of the pier, which jutted out into the harbor.

Then a kerchief was seen fluttering from the arbor door, and Nick Burton hastily called a young officer to take the deck, and springing into the gig sculled rapidly ashore.

The one that met him as he sprung upon the pier was Ruth Rowland, and a more beautiful girl eyes would not care to rest upon.

Her form was perfect, her features cast in a strong mold, yet lovely and full of expression, while her eyes were large and showed a nature full of passionate earnestness.

Her face was slightly flushed, and an angry light shone in her eyes, as she said:

"Nick, pardon me for calling you away from your duties, but I just came from the post, and there I received this letter."

"It is anonymous, but it is meant for mischief, and I determined at once to show it to you."

Nick took the letter, glanced at it an instant, and his eyes flashed angrily.

What he read was as follows:

"BOSTON, May 5th, 17—"

"MISS RUTH ROWLAND:—There is an old saw that 'where there is smoke there is fire,' and I apply it in this case to Nick Burton."

"He was accused of being in league with pirates, and he should have been hanged, but escaped for he is, as will yet be proven, a wolf in sheep's clothing."

"I know whereof I speak, and I warn you to cast the snake out of your heart, for such is Light-house Nick, although he holds a midshipman's rank, and he will yet sting to death the one who trusts him with her love."

"Be warned while yet there is time, for I mean you well."

"Do not show this letter, and ere long I will send you my first proofs that the man you love is in league with Keno, the Kennebec, who is no more or less than the Indian Pirate, although he pretends to be an honest coaster."

TRUTH."

"Well, Ruth, what do you think of this letter?" quietly asked Nick, when he had read it.

"That only a coward will write that to which he dares not put his name," she answered, indignantly.

"Such is my opinion; but have you no idea of the sender?"

"Yes."

"Will you tell me?"

"No, or at least not now."

"Well, it was sent from Boston, and the brig-of-war Breeze, which sailed from here two weeks ago, is in that port now."

"Yes, but you surely do not suspect Captain Donald Dean?"

"A thousand times no, for no truer man lives than Donald Dean, and though he knows me to be his successful rival for your hand, he would stoop to no act of dishonor to lose me your love; but he has an officer on board who also loves you."

"Duncan Reid?"

"Yes, Ruth."

"I do not like him."

"Nor I, and he is made of far different stuff from Donald Dean, and upon him my suspicions now turn, and if he has written this letter, I shall hold him accountable for his words, even though he may be my superior officer."

"Oh, Nick! I am sorry I showed it to you, for you are very angry."

"No, Ruth, I am hurt to feel that I can be accused of being such as this letter calls me; but I must return to my schooner, so farewell," and the young sailor again sprung into his boat and sculled back to his schooner, an ominous light in his dark eyes that betokened no good for the man who had tried to turn the love of Ruth Rowland against him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF THE KENNEBEC.

UPON the banks of a small stream, flowing into island-dotted Casco Bay, there can still be seen the ruins of what was at one time, over a hundred years ago, the fortified home of a brave people.

There, the remnant of a once mighty tribe of Indians had settled down to await the call to the happy hunting-grounds.

But their chief was not one to live in idleness, and to let his people die of hunger, so he had his warriors build canoes, and they began the lives of fishermen, selling their finny cargoes to the whites, and thus making a fair subsistence.

Others were wont to hunt the forests for game, and the furs of wild animals which they dressed, also brought them a good revenue.

Encouraged by their success the red-skins took an interest in their village by the sea.

Warm bark wigwams were built, earthworks were thrown up around their village, to serve as a defense against foes, their canoes were exchanged for fishing-smacks, and the warriors became expert and daring sailors, drawing from the sea their cargoes of fish, and carrying them themselves to the towns to dispose of.

Many whites became jealous of their prosperity, and rumors set afloat that the Indian village was but the haunt of smugglers.

Closely were they watched, but nothing could be discovered to prove their charges.

Then it was said that the red sailors of the Kennebec were even worse than smugglers, for they were actually pirates, and had been known to go out with their fishing-fleet at night, and boldly bring to and rob merchant vessels and coasters.

Still this could not be proven, and the Government cruisers could find no suspicious circumstances, in the lives of the red-skin sailors to warrant their burning their village and scuttling their little vessels, so concluded that it was all the jealousy of the discontented whites that originated the reports.

One night a man-of-war's boat visited the Indian Fort, as the village was called, and urged Keno, the Kennebec chief to come with his warriors and aid in the capture of a pirate craft, which had run into an inlet for repairs.

The chief obeyed the demand, and with his warriors in their canoes, departed with the man-of-war's boat as pilot.

Alas! he was led into a trap, for the boat came from a pirate, and not an American war-vessel, and the outlaw craft ran up to the Indian Fort, dropped anchor, and her crew massacred the defenseless women, children and old men, and wiped out their homes from the face of the earth.

Back to their village came the warriors of the Kennebec, for in the darkness of the night, they had been deserted by their pretended guide-boat, far from their little fort.

But what a scene met their view!

One that beggars description, for their village was in ashes, their women, children and old men lay dead among the ruins.

Then in his anger Keno the Kennebec chief said to his warriors:

"If we are red-men, we are sailors, and can glide over the seas in our own vessel."

"The whites near whom we live have not done this deed, though they have been our foes in the past."

"White hounds of the seas have killed our people, and we will hunt them from off the face of the deep and have our revenge."

"Come, let them call us outlaws, smugglers and pirates, for what care we now? We shall be avengers."

"Come, my braves, for we shall go where an outlaw vessel lies, and we will be her crew."

Away from their wrecked homes went the Indian crew.

They boarded their little fishing-smacks, spread their white sails, and turned their prows seaward.

Down the coast flew the little fleet of five vessels, with its fourscore of red-skin sailors, and toward nightfall they headed in toward a group of islands, around which it was hazardous in the extreme to sail the waters.

But Keno the Kennebec knew well every channel, and toward midnight the little fleet in single file, sailed through a circuitous and dangerous passage and entered a small island basin or harbor.

It was the resort of a smuggler band, and a haunt which many a cruiser had sought in vain.

Keno knew them as more than smugglers, as men who often struck a blow as pirates against defenseless merchant vessels, and that they possessed a vessel that would suit him for the sea work he was to do.

His child, his little daughter, Wild Bird, the pride of his heart, had not been found among his dead people.

Wild Bird's body was not there, and he felt that she had been borne off a captive, and who but the outlaws of the coast had done this?

Like hounds upon a stag, the little smacks circled around the schooner at anchor there, and boarding her with terrific yells, the work of death began.

Surprised and alarmed, the outlaws met their foes only to fall before them, until, seeing the uselessness of the struggle, they cried loudly for mercy.

But no mercy was shown, and the red work continued until the last outlaw had fallen.

Landing, the red sailors attacked the few outlaws ashore, and those too shared the fate of their comrades, and the Kennebecs held the island in triumph.

Their first blow of revenge had been struck, but the Wild Bird was not found, and the hunt must still be kept up, the red trail over the seas must still be followed.

Thus did the Kennebec chief gain the name of the Indian Pirate, and his name became dreaded far and wide.

When Nick the Light-house Boy made his escape, through the act of one who will soon be well known in this romance, it was asserted that he had leagued himself with the Indian Pirate, and Captain Donald Dean, of the pretty brig-of-war Breeze, was cruising up and down the coast in search of the red-skin buccaniers, who had boldly entered the harbor of Portland and cut out a schooner that was being fitted out as a cruiser.

Rumors were also afloat that Burke, the Buccaneer, a desperate West Indian rover, had been seen off the coast, and honest vessels dared not put to sea.

In the midst of all this excitement the Indian Pirate sailed into port, and in her wake was the captured schooner, and astern of the latter came the craft of Burke the Buccaneer.

The story was soon told by Nick Burton, who brought the vessels into port, of how the Kennebecs had been avenging their massacred people, and had captured Burke the Buccaneer, and then his own innocence was fully established, and the Indian Pirate, pardoned for what acts he had done, was allowed to keep his vessel, which he turned into a merchant coaster, hoping that he might yet find his missing Wild Bird.

But time passed on, ports were visited, and the Kennebecs still roved the sea without finding the missing girl, and hope almost died in the heart of their chief of ever seeing his beautiful Wild Bird again.

Thus, with the last of the Kennebecs roving the sea in their own vessel, we find them, at the time of the opening of this story, their craft, though a trader along the coast, shunned by the superstitious skippers of New England as a vessel that would bring them ill-omen.

CHAPTER V.

THE KENNEBEC'S OFFER.

WHEN living at his light-house with his parents, as a boy, Nick Burton had been constantly gliding about the waters of Casco Bay in his little canoe, with its leg-of-mutton sail, and again in a small sloop-yacht which his father had bought for him.

In this way he had become a good sailor, and was noted as the best pilot along the coast in spite of his years.

Education in those days was not thought as much of as it is now; but Mr. and Mrs. Burton were refined and educated people, and they had taught their son more than he could learn in the school of the day.

As he grew older Nick went to sea, before the mast, and after a cruise of several years returned as mate of a vessel, to find his father dead, and his mother alone.

So he gave up the sea and settled down at the light-house, for its care gave them a fair living.

It was while cruising about Casco Bay that Nick had met the Kennebec Indians.

He had often befriended them, and never had any of their warrior-fishermen gone hungry away from Light-house Island.

The Kennebecs, therefore, had for Nick Burton the warmest feeling of gratitude, and it was his influence that had caused Keno, the Kennebec chief, to surrender his vessel as he did, and carry back the captured schooner along with his prize, the craft of Burke the Buccaneer.

Upon the capture of that vessel both Nick Burton and the Indian Pirate had been deeply disappointed, for the youth had hoped to find some clew to his mother's strange disappearance from the light-house, and the chief had expected to discover his daughter, for it had now come to be understood that Burke had been the one who had destroyed his village and slain his people.

The buccaneer chief, however, could not be found when the action was over, and neither was his body discovered among the slain.

Whether he had sprung into the sea and made his escape by swimming to some of the islands, or been knocked overboard and drowned, was not known, so the victors had to content themselves with the capture of his vessel and crew.

Having brought the reader into a better understanding of the characters of my story, I will now return to Nick Burton, as he stood on the deck of the schooner-of-war, several hours after his meeting with Ruth Rowland in the little arbor.

It was after dark, and as it was his night ashore, he dressed himself with his usual care and called to a crew to row him to a city landing.

A brisk walk carried him to the Rowland Manor in fifteen minutes, and he was met at the door by Ruth herself, who drew him into the parlor, as her father had a visitor in the library.

That visitor Nick Burton caught sight of a few minutes later, as he passed the parlor-door on his way out, and he started as he saw him.

Ruth saw the start, and at once asked the cause.

"I merely recognized an old acquaintance in your father's visitor," was the reply.

"Indeed! who was it, for I do not know?"

"A man that was on the schooner of Burke the Buccaneer."

"Do you mean it, Nick?" asked Ruth, in surprise.

"Yes; I cannot be mistaken."

"But I thought the officers of that vessel were all hanged and the crew put in prison?"

"Such was the case, but that one is out."

"I will ask father about this."

"No, do not speak of it, Ruth," was the reply, and the subject was dropped as Doctor Rowland entered the room.

He was a dark-faced, handsome man, dignified to haughtiness, and with a soldierly air in his carriage and step.

He greeted the young sailor pleasantly, and then said:

"You cannot guess whom I just had for a visitor?"

"I think I can, sir," answered Nick, quietly.

"Who?"

"A man who was one of the crew of Burke the Buccaneer."

"You are right. He says that he was not one of the crew voluntarily, having been captured and forced to become such, and proving this he was released from prison."

"He brought a letter to me from an old friend of mine whom he met, asking me to give him employment, and not knowing that you were here, I sent him to your vessel with a recommendation to Lieutenant Calvin Mabrey."

"He will doubtless get a berth, sir, for we need good men," was the answer, and then the conversation changed to other topics, and an hour passed pleasantly away.

Rising to take his leave, Nick Burton's eyes fell upon a face at the window looking in upon him.

It was instantly removed, but not until he had recognized the seaman who had departed from the house, bearing a letter from Doctor Rowland asking that he be given a berth upon the schooner-of-war Barkaway.

Not a sign did the young sailor give to show what he had seen, and with a pleasant smile he bade Ruth and her father good-night, the latter calling after him:

"You and Mabrey dine with us to-morrow, Burton."

"Thank you, sir," responded Nick, and instantly he turned into the walk which led him down to the shore, and not out through the gateway into the street leading into the town.

As he did so, he muttered to himself:

"What does that fellow mean, I wonder?"

"He seemed to be watching me, and he may be all right; but it does not look so and I shall keep my eye upon him."

A short walk brought him to the little pier, and he again said:

"I shall borrow Ruth's row-boat to go off in to the schooner, and have the men bring it back in the morning— Ha!"

"It is me, Keno the Kennebec! Put up your weapon!"

The tones were deep, and the accent slight in which they were spoken.

The speaker was an Indian, tall, muscular and erect.

He was dressed in leggings, but his body was bare to the waist, though a red blanket hung from his shoulders.

It was bright starlight, and the starbeams glistened upon his bare bronzed breast, and upon weapons he wore in a belt that encircled his waist.

A splendid type of manhood he was, wild-looking, stern and dangerous.

He had suddenly stepped from the arbor and confronted Nick Burton, who had started back, as from an apparition, his hand dropping quickly upon his sword-hilt.

Recognizing the chief of the Kennebecs, in an instant, he held forth his hand and said pleasantly:

"Chief Keno, I am glad to see you."

"Is your vessel in port?"

"My vessel lies yonder," and the chief pointed down the bay.

"How came you here, then?"

"My canoe is there, and I came to see my friend."

"Me?"

"You have spoken."

"How can I serve you, chief, for you know that I will if I can."

"I do not know that; I have come to see."

"Then out with it, Keno, for you seem troubled."

"I am troubled, and my heart is sad."

"This is no life for me, or my people, trading from port to port."

"We are the remnant of a mighty people, though the whites now call us simply the Kennebecs."

"Our homes were laid in ashes, our women and children, and our white-haired fathers, too old to battle for their wigwams and those they loved, were massacred."

"You know that Keno and his braves are all that are left, except my child, and I feel that she yet lives, and I would find her."

"I sought the trail of my foes upon the sea and I made the waters red with their blood."

"You was with me, and you know me and my warriors."

"I gave up war because you asked it, and became a man of peace, and my braves hid their weapons in the sea."

"But our hearts are heavy, our lives are sad, and our souls thirst for revenge."

"We cannot longer sail the seas in peace, while our dead walk the earth in spirit un-avenged."

"We are brave, and we are good sailors; we have a fleet wing-canoe to float in over the waters, and we wish to have you lead us against our foes."

The chief had spoken in a low, distinct tone, and looked the while straight into the youth's face.

Nick felt for him in his sorrow, and admired him and his red sailors greatly: but this offer to become their captain fell upon him like a thunder-clap, and he stood in silence, not knowing what to say.

Seeing that the youth made no reply, Keno continued in the same deep, earnest tones: "The offer we make you, young chief, because we love you."

"We know you, and we have seen you tried."

"We are good sailors to obey your bidding; but we fear to go far upon the big sea, for we know not the white man's way to read the heavens and the waters to find our way back."

"As long as the shores are in view and near, we do not fear; but we want you for our captain, that we may spread our cloth wings and go where we please, and strike at our foes."

"But Keno, I cannot go with you, for I am an officer of the Government, and could not desert my ship."

"You could no longer be a young chief among your people?"

"No, I could not resign, and would not if I could."

"And, Keno, my good friend, it pains me to hear you speak of once more becoming a rover, seeking revenge, for I know that a bitter end must come to you and your braves if you persist in it."

"Not if you are our chief, that we may fly far from here."

"Ah yes, the cruel, bitter end must come, Keno, for the hands of all honest white men are turned against sea outlaws, and such you will be."

"Stay upon this coast, continue your trading from port to port, remain near the graves of your people, and all will be well."

"No, a dream came to me and told me to go upon the sea."

"It told me to come to you."

"I cannot go with you, chief."

"My pale-face friend is a poor man?"

"Yes, I am not rich, that is certain," said Nick with a smile.

"He loves the beautiful maiden that dwells in yonder big wigwam?" and he pointed upon the hill to Roland Manor.

"I confess it, chief."

"If the young white chief will go with me, I will give him gold that will make him far richer than the lady he loves."

"The Kennebec makes no idle talk; he has gold and sparkling stones, and the young white chief shall have all if he will go."

"Do not tempt me, Keno, for I cannot go with you."

"Perhaps the young chief think the Kennebec has no gold?"

"Oh, yes, I know it is said that your people got vast wealth off of a Spanish wreck years ago, and have it buried away on some of the islands."

"I do not doubt you, Keno, only I cannot accept your offer, and wish that you would take my advice and still remain as you are."

"No: has my friend spoken straight?"

"I have."

"He is still Keno's friend?"

"Always."

"And the friend of the Kennebecs?"

"Always."

"The Kennebecs are his friends too."

"Good-by!" and grasping the hand of the youth the chief wheeled upon his heel, and springing into his light canoe at the end of the pier, paddled swiftly away, while Nick Burton, lost in deep meditation, rowed slowly out to his schooner, which lay at anchor a quarter of a mile distant.

Asking the officer if a seaman had been out looking for a berth, he was told that one had, and had gone ashore for his kit, intending to come off in the morning.

"Strange that that fellow should have at once returned to Rowland Manor."

"I must keep my eye on that man."

So saying, Nick Burton went below and turned in for the night.

CHAPTER VI.

THE HERMITS.

UPON one of the larger islands of the Casco Bay, there dwelt two persons, whose acquaintance I am now anxious to have the reader make.

The island on which was their habitation presented on all sides a bold and precipitous shore, rocky and forbidding, while a wall of reefs seemed to nearly encircle it.

The cliff sides of the island rose in height from twenty to sixty feet, and were fringed along the top with a thick growth of hardy pines.

In the interior taller pines reared their heads aloft, and other trees were visible, showing that the soil was fertile.

The island comprised about twenty acres, and here and there were garden patches carefully tilled and growing corn and potatoes.

Near the seaside a pile of rocks, cast up by nature, formed a shelter for a stoutly built log cabin, which was built against the rocky wall, and was so situated that from the shed in front, which served as a porch, one could obtain a view of the distant sea over the tops of the stunted pines growing along the cliffs.

The cabin was large, having two rooms and a cavern in the rocks, connected with the hut by a passageway, serving as a kitchen and store-room.

The furniture of the place had without doubt done duty on half a dozen different vessels, for it was ship furniture, and no two pieces alike; still it was comfortable, and the little cabin was by no means uninviting as a habitation, for all about it was neat as wax.

A large fire-place in one room, shelves of books, with some paintings by no mean artist, pencil sketches evidently of scenes on Casco Bay, a Spanish guitar, and a Turkish rug upon the floor showed that those who dwelt there had some refinement and education at least.

A couple of large dogs lay asleep in front of the door outside, and several cats were perched upon the rocks watching the sleeping canines, while hanging to the branches of the overhanging trees were half a dozen cages of rustic workmanship, each containing two or more birds, some native of that region, and others having evidently come from the far south, among the latter being a superb parrot that was glancing out through the opening in the trees and yelling with all his might:

"Boat ahoy! Neptune, boat ahoy!"

As he continued the call the door of one of the rooms in the cabin suddenly opened, and a man stepped out into the glare of day.

A strange-looking being he was, over six feet in height, with an erect bearing, long white beard and hair, and dressed in the uniform of a sea-captain of no particular nation.

At his side hung a sword with jeweled hilt, and about his waist was a red silk sash in which were stuck a dagger and two gold-mounted pistols, clumsy-looking, but dangerous weapons.

The slow movements of the old man showed that he was near fourscore years; but his eyes were bright and all of his strength had by no means departed from him.

"Ho, Neptune! boat ahoy! boat ahoy!" shrieked the parrot, and the old man glanced out over the waters, and his eyes fell upon the coming boat.

"It is Nell! I will meet her."

"Good Poll, good Poll, ever on the alert," he said addressing to the parrot the last words.

Then taking a long staff, carved in a fantastic fashion, which was leaning against the cabin, he proceeded along a well-worn path down to a little basin, fifty yards distant.

Then, upon the beach were several skiffs, canoes and a life-boat, and anchored off a few fathoms was a small, but stanch-looking little sloop.

She was sharp as a razor, had a long, raking mast, a pencil-like topmast, a bowsprit that projected far out over the bows and her boom went over the stern almost as far, showing that a vast quantity of sail could be spread if she could carry it.

A closer look showed that she went deep in the water, and her beam was very great for her length, while she had miniature bulwarks that were quite high and the combing around the cockpit rose almost to the head of one sitting at the tiller.

She had a small cabin, her rigging was as strong as iron, no extra ropes being in use, her sails could be reefed down so as to spread a very small space to the wind.

Her bows rose high, so that she could keep her decks dry, and in fact she was just what she looked, a fleet craft, and a safe one in any blow, capable of being easily handled and going anywhere.

As the old man reached the shore the boat the parrot had sighted came in view.

It did not seem to be heading for the sheltered inlet, for it held on a course as though to pass the island.

But a moment after it went about, changed its course, and shot in through a break in the reef wall before spoken of.

Had it attempted to run in to the island at any other point in view, total wreck would have followed.

One tack to port, after entering the reef, and another to starboard brought the boat straight into the inlet, and the one at the tiller let fall the sail and grounded her upon the beach.

The boat was a light surf skiff, carrying a small sail, and glided over the waters like a feather.

The occupant was a young girl, a rough character, so to speak, if one might judge from her appearance.

She was certainly a strange, striking-looking being, for no one would have called her other than beautiful, though her beauty had something of the weird in it.

Her hair was golden, and put up in massive braids, it hung in festoons adown her back, and was tied with a black ribbon.

Her dress consisted of a tight-fitting velvet jacket, worn over a short skirt of blue cloth, and upon her feet were boots of the old style cavalier order.

Around her slender waist was a sash, and in it were two pistols and a long-bladed knife.

Her face was brown as a berry, and the rosy hue of health flowed in every vein.

Red, warm lips, full of expression, eyes that

were dreamy, and yet fiery in their look when turned upon you, beautifully long lashes and strongly marked brows, she certainly possessed a lovely face, and the exquisite molding of her form was by no means hidden by her odd attire.

"A good catch, grandpa," she said, pleasantly, pointing to a large basket full of fish that was in the boat.

"I am glad you are back, child, for I get very lonesome now, if you are gone a few hours," said the old man.

"Oh! don't fear for me, grandpa, for I was not born to be drowned!" she answered with a laugh.

"No, I know there is no better sailor on this coast, Nell; but it is that you may be captured that I fear."

"I take good care of that, grandpa."

"You know poor Mrs. Burton was taken from her light-house home, and then there is the Wild Bird, the little daughter of the Indian Pirate, she was kidnapped, and I know there are bad men in these waters all the time, and I fear for you."

"I'll take the Scud when I go again, grandpa, whether it is to the port for stores, or fishing, and there is not a craft afloat that can catch her in these waters."

"True, but iron shot can."

"I must risk something; but why are you so anxious about pirates now, grandpa?"

"Have you seen any strange sails about?"

"No, it's only my feelings; but let us go up to the cabin and have supper."

Each took a handle of the basket and carried it up the hill, stopping to rest in a thicket which concealed a ship's brass howitzer, strongly mounted and commanding the entrance through the reefs.

A pile of balls were near, also some grape-shot, and a small magazine was back amid a pile of rocks.

Arriving at the cabin the parrot greeted them with:

"Island Nell, ahoy! Ho, Old Neptune, ahoy!"

"Storm coming! storm coming!"

At the latter words of the parrot, Nell glanced about her, and said:

"Poll is right, grandpa, there is a storm brewing out at sea, and I must go down after supper and see that the boats are all right."

Sitting down near the cabin kitchen, the old man began to scale and clean the fish for supper, having a most attentive audience in the two dogs and the cats, while Island Nell set about building a fire and making bread and coffee.

"Storm coming! storm coming! Bad night! bad night!" shrieked the parrot, and as though to prove his words, the low rumble of thunder was heard far out at sea, and the winds began to sigh mournfully through the pines.

CHAPTER VII.

A VISITOR TO HERMIT'S ISLE.

THE old Hermit, whom the parrot called Neptune, and his pretty granddaughter had just sat down to eat their supper, which was certainly a pleasant one, when Poll shrieked out:

"Boat ahoy! boat ahoy!"

The old man and maiden were on their feet in an instant, and beheld a small row-boat heading in toward the shore.

Instantly seizing a trumpet, and running toward the bluff, Island Nell sent forth the thrilling cry:

"Ho, the boat! Back water quick, or your boat is knocked to pieces."

The sea was rough, the wind setting on shore, and the oarsman was not able to check the boat; and in an instant came a crash, as he struck the sunken reef.

A second wave tossed the boat down again with a crash, and the man was dashed into the water.

Island Nell seemed to have anticipated just this, for, after shouting her warning, she had run with the speed of a deer to the basin, sprung into a light canoe, and was within a short distance of the wrecked man when he was thrown into the water.

"Help, for the love of God! Help, for I cannot swim!" came the despairing cry, and the boatman was hurled by a wave clean over the reef into stiller water.

Down from sight he sunk, a second cry smothered by the waters, and as he arose, Nell was near and grasped his hand.

"The canoe will not hold us both, but grasp the gunwale and I will tow you inshore," she said, coolly.

He grasped it with an energy that threatened to swamp the frail canoe, when, seizing a paddle, she cried sternly:

"Obey me, or I will kill you!"

He knew that she was in earnest—realized that she was acting for his good—and obeyed.

Then she paddled rapidly shoreward, the man still clinging to the canoe.

Reaching the basin, the man touched bottom with his feet and walked ashore, while he said:

"Girl, you saved me from going to Davy Jones's locker that time."

"Are you shipwrecked, that you are alone in a rowboat in these waters?" she asked.

"No; I came down the coast in a schooner, had your island pointed out to me, and took my boat and pulled for it."

"Why did you come here?"

"To see Old Neptune, the Hermit."

"What business have you with him?"

"That I will tell him when I see him."

"You should not have come here, for this is our home, and we wish no friendship with the outer world."

"We harm no one, allow no one to harm us, and neither wish or receive visitors; but as you are here, you may see my grandfather, for I will not turn away a wrecked man."

"Come!"

She led the way up the path to the cabin, and as they approached the parrot yelled out:

"Bad man! bad man!"

"Curse the bird of ill-omen!" muttered the stranger, and hearing his words, Nell said:

"Poll is no fool, sir; but here is my grandfather. Down, Bounce, go away, Bluff!" she called out as the two huge dogs came toward the man, growling fiercely.

"Bad man! bad man!" shrieked Poll, while the cats spread their tails as large as their bodies, humped their backs, and spit and whined, while the birds fluttered about their cages.

It was very evident that the islanders did not often see a stranger.

"Grandpa, this man wishes to see you."

"He attempted to cross the reef and got his boat knocked to pieces, and so I brought him up to the cabin," said Nell.

"Who are you?" asked Old Neptune, sternly.

"Jack Downes by name, a sailor by profession," was the short reply.

"What business have you with me?"

"That I will make known to you when I can see you alone."

"I have no secrets from my child."

"But I have."

"Be it so; let me give you some dry clothes, and then have supper with us, after which you can tell me what you have to say."

The man accepted a dry suit, and did full justice to the supper, the dogs, cats and birds keeping their eyes upon him the while, as though they felt that he was taking their share of the victuals.

"Now, sir, let me know why you have come here, to a spot where I hoped to live without being intruded upon by mankind," said Old Neptune, taking his favorite seat under the shelter of the little porch, and motioning the stranger to Nell's chair, at the same time offering him one of his pipes to smoke.

"I came to see if I could not strike a bargain with you."

"I have nothing to sell, and wish to make no purchases."

"You do not get my meaning."

"Then explain yourself plain."

"You know, I believe, a youth by the name of Nick Burton."

"I did, but I never see him now."

"He treated your granddaughter in a most shameful way."

"How do you mean, sir?" and Old Neptune's eyes flashed fire.

"He won her love, and then deserted her for another."

"It is false, sir! Nick Burton did no such thing."

"I have heard so."

"You were misinformed."

"She saved his life, did she not?"

"Yes, and once he saved both Nell and myself from death."

"We were ever on friendly terms, and I knew that the charges brought against him of piracy, were utterly false."

"Nell was determined that they should not hang him at the yard-arm, so she laid a plan to save him."

"She went up to town and told Captain Dean of the brig-of-war Breeze, that the Indian Pirate was anchored among the islands, and that Nick Burton was the only man could pilot him there."

"The boy was allowed to go on deck and act as pilot, and, at a signal from Nell he sprang overboard in the night, and a boat was near to pick him up, while Nell took the wheel and run the brig on in safety."

"The result was that Nick Burton joined the Indian Pirate, and with his vessel captured Buccaneer Burke and did other good service, at the same time proving by the captured pirates that he was in no way leagued with them."

"There is the story as it was."

"But how about your Nell's love for him?"

"Ah! she did love him, she does love him, and ever will; but no word of love ever passed between them, and, as his affections are placed elsewhere Nell accepts her fate as a noble girl should."

"That is all, sir."

"Would you not like to avenge yourself upon Nick Burton for slighting your child?"

"There is nothing to avenge."

"Have you no grievance against him?"

"None."

"And your child?"

"Has none either."

"Would you not like to see his proud head lowered with shame?"

"No, sir!"

"Would you not aid in bringing ruin upon him?"

"I would not."

"Not for gold?"

"No, sir, emphatically no!"

"And Nell?"

"Just dare to make the offer to her, and you will find that where she saved your life, she can also take it."

"I will pay a very large sum."

"Your gold I neither seek or want, and, if you have nothing more to say, you can go, for it will be dark in another hour and these are wild waters to be caught in by day even."

"I have no boat."

"Nell will see you to a point of land, from whence you can walk to some habitation."

"Not to-night, surely."

"Yes, to-night; ho, Nell!"

"Yes, grandpa," and she answered so promptly that it might be suspected that she had been near enough to overhear what was said.

In fact Nell had not liked the stranger's looks, and had been near to aid her grandfather if need be.

"Nell, can you not run this man over to Cedar Point and land him?"

"Yes, grandfather; but which way are you going?"

"To Portland."

"Then I will land you on Lookout Island, and give you a boat I have here, and something to eat."

"You can soon hail a coaster from there and row out to it, while if I take you to Cedar Point the distance is much further, and you will have to walk a long way."

"I'll go by Lookout Island then, for I would rather reach Portland by water, than by land."

Nell quickly prepared a snack for him, and led the way down to the basin.

It was now almost sunset, and the storm far out at sea was slowly coming landward, the thunder growing louder and louder.

"You can run over in an hour with this breeze, Nell; but if the storm rises rapidly run for shelter and don't attempt to return to-night," said Old Neptune.

"All right, grandpa; don't be anxious about me," was the answer, and setting sail, in which the stranger aided her with nimble hands, she headed the Scud out of the basin, while the parrot's shrill call followed her:

"Come back! storm coming! bad night! Come back! bad man! Boat ahoy!"

"Curse that bird!" again muttered the stranger, as he watched the skillful manner in which Island Nell ran the dangerous channel leading out into open water.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS PLOT.

ONCE the Scud had gotten out of the reef channel, Island Nell gave her a free sheet, and she went flying over the waters at a speed that surprised the stranger and won his admiration.

"Your smack fairly flies, girl," he said.

"Yes, the Scud is very fast."

"You handle her well, too."

"I should do so, for I am always on the water."

"Do you know why I called upon your grandpa?"

"Yes."

"You heard what was said?"

"I did."

"Do you agree with him?"

"In what respect?"

"As to Nick Burton?"

"His having been in league with pirates, you mean?"

"Do you think that he was?"

"He might have been."

"Yet you rescued him?"

"I did."

"And yet held a suspicion that he might be a pirate?"

"I loved him," was the low response and frank confession.

"And still love him?" ventured Jack Downes. Nell looked up with flashing eyes and her voice rung as she asked:

"Do you think a woman would love a man who cast her aside, after she had saved his life, to bestow his love upon another, one above him in station?"

"Ha! I felt that the old man was wrong," muttered the sailor, and aloud he said:

"I certainly cannot see how a woman could love such a fickle fellow; but your grandfather seemed to think differently."

"Grandpa is old and childish."

"He loves Nick Burton as though he were his son, and he can see no wrong in anything he does."

"And you?"

"I have said all that I intend to upon the subject, and more too."

"You would like to see Nick Burton receive a blow that would lower his pride, though?"

Island Nell did not reply.

"You would like to enjoy a little bit of sweet revenge?" continued the man.

But still Nell made no reply.

"It is in your power to punish Nick Burton for the way he has treated you."

"How can I?" almost savagely asked the young girl.

"You can simply appear against him, when called upon to do so, and state that you know him to be in league with pirates."

"But I do not know him to be."

"Suppose it is proven to you that he is?"

"Then I can believe it, but people will think I acted from jealousy."

"No, but you hold yourself in readiness to have it shown you that Nick Burton, although he holds a midshipman's rank in the navy, is secretly in league with pirates."

"How will you prove it?"

"I cannot tell you now, but you shall see that I speak the truth."

"Do you see that island?" and the man pointed to an island a mile distant that was literally overgrown with pines.

"Yes."

"Do you ever go there?"

"Yes, I have been there hunting for game."

"Is there any difficulty about landing there?"

"No, if it is done with care."

"You see the tall pine, the one that has been struck by lightning and stripped of its branches?"

"Yes."

"Can you see it from your island?"

"Readily."

"Well, I will make that our rendezvous place, and you watch daily for a red flag to fly from that old pine."

"When you see it, come there in your boat, and I will give you proof of what I tell you."

"I will come when I see your flag; but what have you against Nick Burton?"

"I am a Government officer and I am searching proof against him, for it is said that he is really in league with pirates, and when you can swear to the truth of it, he will soon end his career of crime."

"If he is guilty, I hope he may; but I should hate to accuse him falsely, even though he does not love me."

"If he is guilty, you will be avenged; but where is it that you intend to land me?"

"On yonder island, where you see the point jutting out into the sea."

"It was there that I intended to ask you to land me, even though your grandfather wished me to go elsewhere."

In a little while the little sloop was luffed up into the wind and the man stepped into the boat in tow and said:

"I have to thank you for saving my life, girl, and I'll remember it."

"Good-by, and don't forget to watch for the flag."

"I will not, sir," and the Scud dashed away, leaving Jack Downes to row ashore in the boat which Island Nell had given him.

Instead of heading directly back for home, she rounded a large island that was one of the outer chain that met the full sea surf.

Out through the surf she ran her stanch craft, and rounding the island darted inshore where there was an inlet.

The water was very deep and she ran right up to the shore, upon which she sprang, painter in hand.

Making it fast to a tree, she ran through the woods to the other end of the island, and peered out over the waters toward the one on which Jack Downes had landed.

"Aha! he is not alone then, and there is where he came from in his boat," she said, as she saw a smack shoot out from the other side of the island where Jack Downes had landed, and head up the coast toward Portland.

Through a small spy-glass she had swung over her shoulder by a strap, she gazed at the distant craft, growing dim in the twilight.

"The boat I gave him is in tow, and he is on the smack's deck."

"There is something in all this that means death to Nick Burton."

"Well, I shall see," and Island Nell made her way back to the Scud, arriving there just as darkness set in, and the loud roll of thunder convinced her that the slowly coming storm was not far off.

As she sped out from the little inlet her eyes fell upon a trim-looking schooner lying a league off shore and becalmed.

"That craft is in a dangerous place with that storm bearing down upon it," she muttered.

"Ah! the wind has lulled, and I've got to fight my way back home through this storm, and it won't be long before it comes, so I'll get ready for it."

With this she set to work and reefed down her sails, put all to ship-shape about the craft, and drew on a long oilskin coat to protect her from the wet.

Her slouch hat was then thrown into the cabin, and a tarpaulin drawn on her head to protect her masses of hair.

The lightning now played incessantly, but there was not a breath of wind and the waters were as smooth as glass.

The schooner still lay motionless out upon the

sea, and her sails were reefed and ready to meet the shock of the storm.

By the lightning's glare, which illumined the sea as though under the sunlight, the young girl closely watched the schooner.

"She is a stranger in these waters; but she is a trim and stanch craft, by her build and rig."

"She has the look of an armed cutter, but I can see no guns, and she is too small for a pirate."

"But she was built and rigged to run, that is certain."

"Maybe she is a smuggler from the Canada coast, for she has a foreign look."

"But I can only see half a dozen men upon her decks."

"So much the better, for there will not be so many to die—and die they will, for in the teeth of yonder howling storm she can never keep off this wild coast— Oh! Heaven spare them!"

The last words came almost in a shriek from the lips of Island Nell, as suddenly she beheld a tongue of lurid flame shoot down from the blackness overhead, and descending upon the tall foremast of the unfortunate schooner, shiver it to atoms.

The moment after a darkness that was tangible settled upon island, sea and sky, and then burst from the storm clouds the pent-up hurricane, and fell upon the waters with irresistible fury.

CHAPTER IX.

THE WRECK.

THE little schooner, which had been sighted by Island Nell, had been cruising slowly along the coast, with only a few leagues more to port, when the calm fell upon her.

A glance to the craft was sufficient to show her to be the very one which had sailed away from Sea View Villa haven on the coast of England, bearing with her the man Bronx and the youth Sport.

These two now sat in the stern gazing landward, while the crew, reduced to three men, were in the fore-castle.

One of the crew had been lost overboard in a storm, on the run over, but this had not been greatly regretted by Bronx, as he had said:

"There will be one less to pay."

When the calm came upon them Bronx uttered an imprecation upon his luck, and said in an ill-humored tone:

"This is what I call downright mean fortune, Sport, for here we are, near enough to port to run in under cover of the night, if that wind had not deserted us."

"It is too bad, Bronx," rejoined the youth.

"And that is not the worst of it either, for we are but two leagues off the worst coast on earth, unless it is the Irish coast, and a storm is rising."

"There seem to be anchorages among those islands."

"Oh, yes, there are plenty of them there; but to find one is another thing."

"Can I not take a boat and sound for a channel?"

"No, for the storm might catch you away from the schooner, and besides, I would not dare run in, as we'd knock the keel off of her from cutwater to rudder-post."

"We can weather the storm all right, I guess."

"May be so; but I'd like more offing, for the storms we get off this coast are something to dread, and yonder one is coming right down, gaining full force with plenty of sea-room, and we will have to look out for it, as it seems as though it intended to knock those islands over."

"I don't fear for the schooner, after what I have seen her do."

"Oh, she's good, Sport; only I wish we were in port," was the answer of Bronx, and he called the men together to make all snug to meet the storm.

The tide was setting in, and the schooner was borne slowly landward.

Seeing this, Bronx ordered the anchor let go; but the depth was too great for the cable's length, and the iron was hauled up again.

In this way the schooner drifted to within a league of the shore, and all on board began to feel most anxious regarding their safety, for they beheld the storm coming savagely down upon them, and realized that they were in a most dangerous locality.

If they could only get a breath of wind to work out to sea with, even though it took them right into the teeth of the gale, they would feel secure.

But the wind did not come, the schooner still drifted landward, twilight was upon them, and the storm soon would be.

With the gathering gloom of approaching night the lightning glared incessantly, and far up the coast a beacon gleamed forth over the waters, showing a friendly light-house had sent forth its rays as a warning of danger to vessels coming too near that inhospitable shore.

Nearer and nearer came the storm, when suddenly, out of the gloom overhead, came the fiery bolt which Island Nell had seen, and

descending straight upon the foremast, shivered it to atoms.

Nor was this all, for one of the men had been leaning against it, gazing at the coming storm, while his two companions were resting their elbows upon the high bulwarks, their eyes bent in the same direction, and as one man they fell in their tracks.

"Holy Heaven! we are gone!" cried Bronx, staggering to his feet, for he had been knocked down by the shock, while Sport, seated in the companionway, had not felt the stroke, and coolly replied:

"While there is life hope remains."

"But the crew are stone dead."

"And we are alive."

"The schooner is a perfect wreck now."

"You are right there, shipmate, and here comes the storm—hold hard!"

Hardly had the words left the lips of the reckless youth when the wall of foaming water, driven by the fierce winds, was upon them.

High upon the waves, almost reaching the perpendicular, the schooner's bow rose, while the winds seized the mainmast and wrenched it from its hold as a whip might be from the human hand, and a wreck was left, hurled about at the mercy of the tempest.

The two men in the stern had clung hard for their lives, and were not swept away; but the three bodies forward were borne off on the waters amid the wreck of the rigging.

"We soon strike, Sport, and then I guess it's all up with us," sorrowfully said Bronx.

"Wait and see before you whine," shouted Sport, his gaze in vain trying to pierce the darkness to landward.

Borne upon the tempest, dashed about like a cork in a mill-race, her bulwarks stove in, her decks washed by the waves, the wreck was driven landward rapidly.

"An hour will settle us," said Bronx, despondently.

"I don't feel that my time has come to die, Bronx."

"You've got nerve, boy."

"I accept the situation, that is all," was the cool reply.

And in drove the wreck, nearer and nearer the shore.

"Hal! there is a light!" suddenly cried Sport as a red gleam was seen through the darkness.

"It's from a cabin on shore."

"I'll get the cabin-lamp and show it them," and in a moment more Bronx had dragged the cabin-lamp from its swing and was waving it upon deck.

"That is no cabin, Bronx, but a craft! See there!" cried Sport.

One glance, and Bronx shouted in stentorian tones:

"Sloop ahoy! ahoy!"

Then both waited and watched, and together came a shout of joy, for the craft was heading straight for the wreck.

"It's a small one to be out in this gale," said Bronx.

"Doubtless a coast pilot."

"No, there are no coast pilots here; it is a fishing-smack caught out, and having seen our danger, comes to our aid."

"I will get my things from the cabin."

"You can carry nothing with you."

"I'll carry those papers and my money, if I lose my life," was the determined response, and Bronx again entered the cabin.

When he returned to the deck, he saw the little sloop dashing swiftly toward them, and but half a cable's length away.

"How does he intend to rescue us?" said Bronx.

"We'll soon know."

"Are you sure he sees us, for he is headed right for us?"

"I'll give the lamp another swing," and Sport suited the action to his words.

A ship's lantern at once was seen to swing around in a circle on board the sloop.

"They see us! but he heads the same," cried Bronx.

Straight as an arrow came the sloop, bounding over the waves like a thing of life, her sails reefed down to almost pocket-handkerchief size, and held as steady on her course as was possible in that wild sea and fierce wind.

The stern of the wrecked schooner was toward the sloop, and the two men stood there together, clinging to the taffrail for support.

"Hol! the wreck!" came in a clear, boyish voice.

"Ahoy the sloop!" shouted Bronx.

"Stand ready to catch these lines, and I will save you," was shouted back from the sloop.

"By Heaven, Sport! that is a woman's voice," cried Bronx, excitedly.

"I believe you are right, and a young one at that."

"Ten to one she's a beauty," said the young gambler, his ruling passion strong in the presence of death.

But Bronx was not in a betting humor just then, and stood ready to obey the order of the daring individual at the helm of the sloop, be it man or woman.

The next instant the sloop's prow shot by the stern of the wreck, and just then the helm was

shoved hard down and as the bows wept slowly around in the teeth of the tempest, half a dozen coiled ropes were skillfully thrown.

They fell upon the shoulders of the two men, and then came the ringing order:

"Spring overboard while she is in stays!"

"Ay, ay!" was the answer, and, having made the rope-ends fast to their bodies, the two men leaped into the sea.

The other ends were made fast to cleats upon the sloop, and the craft still being in stays, for it was no easy work to go about in the face of such a tempest, the one who had so skillfully thrown the ropes now hauled in hard upon the slack of one and then the other.

As the sloop darted away, feeling the wind upon the other quarter, Sport dragged Bronx over the stern, for he had been aided by Island Nell, who had so daringly run out to their rescue.

CHAPTER X.

SPORT MAKES A PRESENT.

"By the beard of Neptune! but you are a girl," cried Bronx, as he settled down in the cockpit of the little sloop, and gazed into the face of Island Nell, for the light from her little cabin lamp fell full upon her.

"Yes," she said, simply.

"I am Island Nell."

"I have heard of you, miss, and it was said, when last I was in these waters, that there were but two on this coast that could equal you as a pilot."

"They are Light-house Nick and the Indian Pirate, I suppose," said Nell.

"Yes, they are the two; but what has become of them?"

"The Indian Pirate is running his schooner as a coaster, I believe, from the Kennebec to Boston, and Light-house Nick is a midshipman in the navy."

"Ah! and is he in these waters?"

"The Kennebec?"

"Well, yes."

"He passed up the coast two days ago in his schooner."

"And the boy?"

"Nick Burton?"

"Yes."

"He is stationed in Portland, I believe."

"Ah yes; but has the Indian the schooner that once belonged to Burke the Buccaneer?"

"Yes."

"Nothing ever heard of Burke, since the night his schooner was taken?"

"No, I believe not."

"Thought to have been drowned?"

"Yes."

"Well, we came very near the same fate, and to you, miss, we owe it that we are not now dead."

"My name is Bronx, miss; Edward Bronx, and this is my mate, Sport, and a sport he is, handsome as a picture, and just the fellow to catch a young girl's eye."

"Now that you have saved his life, he ought to marry you."

"It takes two to make a bargain, sir; but was that your vessel that was lost?"

"It was, and no craft, better for her tonnage, floated the seas."

"There were more than two on board?"

"Yes, but our crew were killed by lightning."

"I saw the stroke, and knowing you would be wrecked, put out to your aid."

"Where from?"

"Among the islands."

"And where are you bound now?"

Island Nell hesitated.

She knew that her grandfather did not wish to have any one come to the island, and she also wished to be left alone to live there in peace.

She did not fancy Bronx, and Sport kept silent, and might be worse even than the one she talked with.

They were shipwrecked men; but still she wished she could do otherwise than carry them home with her.

So she said:

"Whither were you bound?"

"To Portland."

"I can carry you there."

"You?"

"Yes, for I can run there by the bay in a few hours with the wind in our favor."

"But how about your return?"

"I can get back all right."

"Alone?"

"Certainly, if I went out alone to your rescue."

"That's so. Well, miss, if you will run us into Portland harbor, we have the gold to pay for it."

"Thank you, but I do not serve shipwrecked men for gold."

"You will at least wear this, as a souvenir from one who appreciates all that you have done for him," and Sport took the little hand, resting upon the tiller, and slipped upon the third finger his ruby ring.

"Oh, sir! I cannot accept this," cried Nell, her eyes catching the blood-red sparkle, as the cabin light fell upon it.

"Pray do me the honor, my sweet girl, for

the ring is of no value intrinsically, and I would like to feel that you, who have so nobly risked your life to save ours, will wear the ring in remembrance of to-night."

The words were so frank, and so respectfully spoken, that Island Nell said in response:

"I thank you, sir, and I will wear the ring to remind me that I have done some good in the world."

Sport would have replied, but he saw an island looming up ahead, and the single eye of the light-house now shone directly upon them.

Driving past like the wind the sloop darted into a channel between the islands, which neither of the two men had seen, and, after rushing through a seething caldron glided out into stiller waters in the bay.

Toward the town the prow of the schooner was now turned, and with the wind blowing a gale she sped along like a deer, Island Nell guiding her way through the darkness and danger in a manner that won the admiration of both Bronx and Sport, and especially the latter.

"I will land you at yonder pier: the light is in the house of Doctor Rowland, and you can skirt his grounds to the street above, and it will lead you to the city."

"I would run you up to the wharfs, but I am anxious to get back home as soon after daylight as possible, as my grandfather will be anxious about me," said Nell, luffing up sharp, and letting the sloop glide slowly to the Rowland pier.

"And are we not to meet again?" asked Sport, as he turned to follow Bronx out upon the pier.

"I expect not, sir."

"Do you not wish it?"

"It is a matter of total indifference to me, sir."

"Remember, you saved my life."

"I have saved the lives of a score of others, sir."

"Ah me! but I do not give up hope that we shall meet again; good-by," and raising her hand quickly to his lips, he imprinted a kiss thereon and sprang ashore, while Bronx pushed the sloop off.

The sails soon caught the wind, and away flew the craft, the two men standing upon the pier gazing after it until it was lost to sight in the darkness.

"Well, lad, you are dead gone," said Bronx.

"How?"

"In love."

"I believe I am."

"Oh, you've got it bad."

"I believe that girl could make a better man of me, Bronx."

"Nonsense! don't go to preaching, but come on, for this town is to be the scene of our work."

"Come, and I will look up a hotel I once knew here," and the two men crossed the grounds of Rowland Manor and turned into the street leading down into the town.

CHAPTER XI.

A WARNING LETTER.

I MUST now return to Nick Burton, who it will be remembered turned in on board the schooner Barkaway with his mind upon the strange happenings of the day, for he could no more forget the anonymous letter, received by Ruth Rowland, than he could the face of the seaman at the window, and the fact that he had returned to the mansion after having gone on board the schooner.

There was another thing that troubled him also, and that was his conversation with the Indian Pirate, and the fear that the Kennebec chief, maddened by his sorrows, would do some lawless act in his schooner, that would cause the Barkaway to be immediately sent to run him down.

Arising in the morning, Nick found that the coxswain, whom he had told to take Ruth's boat back to its moorings, had just returned, and brought with him a letter from the maiden herself.

"I didn't get off as soon as I expected, sir, and when I rowed up to the pier, I saw the young lady standing there, and so I told her of your borrowing her boat, and she detained me to send you this letter," explained the coxswain.

Nick broke the seal and read:

"MY DEAR NICK:—

"I write you by your man, for I was just about to send our boatman out with a letter."

"The fact is, I am worried, and about you."

"That same man, so my maid Agnes reports, was lying in the bushes at the lawn gate, and apparently waiting for your coming out."

"Agnes had been down in the town, and her beau had escorted her back home, and they came suddenly upon the fellow lying down, as I said, just where he could spring upon you, had you come from the house."

"I wondered how you could have missed him, until the return of my boat told how you had gone back to the schooner."

"Agnes says the man was greatly surprised, and said that he was waiting at your command, but I knew better."

"After awhile I went down to the library for a book, as I was too worried to sleep, and who should be in there with father but that horrid man."

"Father said that he was a stranger, and had lost his way, and he put on his hat and walked out."

with him to put him right, but, Nick, there is something very strange in all this, for it is not like my father to take such trouble with any one, and especially with an ordinary seaman.

"Besides, the servants could have been called to show the man the right way."

"And this is not all, my dear Nick, for the boatman told father that you were on the pier last night for a long time, talking to the Kennebec chief Keno, whom many believe, as you know, to be really a smuggler if not a pirate, in spite of his claiming to be a coast trader."

"Father seemed surprised at this, and questioned the boatman, who said he had started down to take a look at the boats, to see if they were all right, when, seeing you standing there, he had not ventured further."

"Now, Nick, after receiving that anonymous letter, I had fear of coming trouble; but now that the sailor last night has acted so strangely, I dread it still more, and I warn you to be on your guard against impending evil."

"Be sure and dine with us to-day, along with Lieutenant Mabrey, and let me know if that horrid man has shipped on your schooner."

"With love,

"Ever yours,

"RUTH."

Nick read this letter twice over, and then placed it in his pocket, while he went into the cabin for breakfast.

Lieutenant Calvin Mabrey was a man of thirty, with the air and manner of one raised upon the sea.

He was, however, an aristocrat, and thought that no man should rise from the fore-castle to the quarter-deck.

He liked Nick Burton, however, and was glad to have so pleasant and skillful a youth as his next in command.

"Well, Burton, good-morning," he said, pleasantly.

Nick responded in his pleasant way, and then said:

"Lieutenant Mabrey, I am requested by Doctor Rowland to ask you to accompany me there to dinner to-day."

"With pleasure, Burton, I will go, for I wish particularly to hear Miss Rowland sing again, for she comes nearer to the heart with her voice than any I ever listened to before."

"You are a lucky dog, Burton, to win such a prize as that girl."

"I feel that I am, sir; but did you ship a seaman last night, who brought a letter from Doctor Rowland?"

"Yes, a hard-faced fellow, but evidently a good seaman."

"He was illegally held as one of Burke the Buccaneer's crew."

"He did not remain on board?"

"No, he returned ashore at once, to come off this morning with his kit and that reminds me to ask if he has come."

The steward was sent on deck to make the inquiry if Jack Downes had come aboard.

He returned with the answer that he was just then coming off in a shore boat.

A little while after Nick Burton went on deck, and there he saw the man among the crew, and already rigged for work.

"Mr. Haslip, send that new man to me," he said to a young middy.

The man came aft, and Nick saw that his face flushed and then paled slightly at his call, for he eyed him closely.

"You have just shipped, my man?" he said.

"Yes, sir, last night."

"I saw you last night at Doctor Rowland's?"

"No, sir, I didn't see any one there."

"I remember, it was I that saw you, as you passed out, for I was in the parlor."

"Well, my man, the doctor says you bring good letters, and he recommends you, so I hope we will find you a good seaman."

"I will do my duty, sir."

"What is your name?"

"Jack Downes, sir."

"Well, Jack, go forward and let me know if you are not treated well."

"Thank you, sir, but I am not one to complain," and, with a sigh of relief the man went forward, while Nick muttered to himself:

"If that is not a rascal from head to foot, I am no reader of faces."

"I shall keep my eye on him, for I am sure he means mischief. Yes, and I shall heed Ruth's letter, for forewarned is forearmed."

"I feel confident that Doctor Rowland has never looked upon me with favor; but knowing that Ruth loved me has accepted the situation."

"He was hostile toward me when I was tried for piracy, and may be again, though if so, he prefers to keep his hostility secret."

"Well, whatever comes I am ready to meet it, and nothing shall drive me from my determination to have Ruth Rowland for my wife, and, if there is aught for her to forgive after our marriage, let her do so," and the dark brow contracted and the handsome eyes burned brightly with mingled anger and determination.

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERY.

At the appointed hour both Lieutenant Mabrey and Nick Burton, were ready to start for the home of Doctor Rowland.

They were rowed to the little pier, a young middy being left in command of the schooner.

Doctor Rowland met them upon the shore, and escorted them to the mansion, where Ruth gave to both a cordial welcome, for she rather liked Nick's commander.

After a most delightful dinner the carriage was ordered, and the doctor took his guests out to drive, and, returning late they were urged to remain to tea and enjoy a game of whist in the evening.

Nick was only too willing, for he was glad of an excuse to remain near Ruth as long as he could.

While at the tea table a letter was brought in and handed to Lieutenant Mabrey who hastily broke the seal.

As he read it, with a bow of apology to his host and hostess his brow darkened as he said:

"Burton this concerns you."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, you are ordered to report to Boston for duty."

"From whom does the order come, sir?" calmly asked Nick Burton, but his face changed color perceptibly.

"From Commodore Norris, and it is brought by Junior Lieutenant Duncan Reid who is to take your place here."

Nick grew still whiter in the face, but he kept perfectly calm.

"Is Lieutenant Reid on board the Barkaway now, sir?"

"No, he is at the hotel; but I shall be sorry to lose you, Burton, and think that Reid, who is a favorite at head-quarters, and has a rich and influential family, has urged this change."

"I shall be sorry to go, sir," answered Nick, while Ruth tried hard to keep down her emotion.

"Will we have to lose you soon, Mr. Burton?" asked the doctor in a tone of regret.

"As soon as I have attended to some little affairs here, sir," answered Nick, "I shall start."

"If we have to go pirate-hunting in Casco Bay, Burton, I do not know who will be our pilot," said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"You will be able to find some one, sir."

"Can you not recommend some one, while we think of it?"

"There is one person, Lieutenant Mabrey, that knows these waters as well, if not better than I do, but I am not sure that one would act as pilot."

"To whom do you refer?"

"Island Nell."

"Ah yes, that strange, beautiful girl."

"She now lives down the bay with her grandfather, upon an island known as Hermit's Isle, and they keep aloof from every one, and I believe will see no visitors."

"I know that they warn off all who go near their island, and have a howitzer planted so as to command the channel leading in to the island harbor."

"You might, however, as a special favor, secure her services if she knew you could get no one else."

"How about this Indian Pirate?"

"Keno the Kennebec you refer to?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, he knows these waters well too; but I do not know whether you could get him or not."

"By the way, sir, I believe it would not be a bad idea to look Keno up and make him your regular pilot, if you can get him to accept the berth! and ship his warriors as a crew, for you would find no better sailors."

"You know by experience?" suggested Doctor Rowland, and there was something of a sneer in his tone.

But if Nick noticed it he did not show that he did, and frankly answered:

"Yes, sir; when I cruised with the Indian Pirate I learned just what he was."

"I referred to the Kennebec and his crew, knowing fully their worth," said Nick, remembering the conversation he had had with the Indian chief the night before, and thinking that an offer of the kind, to enlist in the service, might prevent him from carrying out his mad threat.

"Where can he be found?"

"He was in port last night, sir," said Nick, without thinking, and unheeding Ruth's warning glance.

"Well, I shall look him up; but I must go down-town and see Reid," said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Permit me to go by the hotel for you, sir, and ask him to come on board," said Nick.

"Allow me to suggest a better plan," said the doctor. "Suppose that you, Mr. Burton, go down to the hotel and bring him up here?"

"I am willing, sir, to ask him to come up," coldly said Nick.

"Shall I order my carriage to be gotten ready for you?"

"No, thank you, Doctor Rowland; I prefer to walk."

And excusing himself, Nick arose from the table.

Ruth also at once arose and accompanied him to the door, leaving her father to entertain Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Oh, Nick, what does all this mean?" cried Ruth, anxiously.

"It means there is some plot on hand, Ruth."

"And Duncan Reid?"

"He is at the bottom of it, for he has sworn to marry you."

"He has sworn falsely!" was the indignant reply.

"So I hope, Ruth."

"And you go to see him now?"

"Yes."

"For my sake be cautious, Nick."

"I will, Ruth. Now I must be off, though I hate to leave you," and snatching a hasty kiss, Nick Burton left the mansion, little dreaming what fate had in store for him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FATAL MEETING.

At a brisk walk Nick Burton held on his way to the hotel, at that time termed an inn.

It was a good old New England mansion metamorphosed into a hostelry, and a favorite resort of the Portland aristocrats of that age.

Entering the hallway, Nick Burton walked up to the landlord, bowing right and left to many that he knew, and asked for Lieutenant Duncan Reid.

He was in at supper, he was told; but just then coming out, Nick Burton approached him.

Duncan Reid was a man of twenty-seven, well built, with a handsome but not prepossessing face, for he wore an almost-continual scowl.

He was dressed in a new uniform—that of a lieutenant—wore his sword, and seeing Nick Burton approaching, slightly changed color.

But he smiled, held out his hand, and said pleasantly:

"Well, Burton, I am glad to see you, though I am sorry to have been sent on to step into your shoes."

Nick Burton did not take the proffered hand to the surprise of many who stood near the two, and saw and heard all, but answered sternly:

"Lieutenant Duncan Reid, I neither believe the one nor the other of your remarks; but I came not here to quarrel with you, for what there is between us must be settled at other time and place."

"I cannot understand your words or manner, Burton, and—"

"You do understand well, sir, just what I mean; but I am commissioned by Doctor Rowland to ask you to come at once to his residence, and Lieutenant Mabrey awaits you there."

"As I desire a word with you, sir, I will walk with you."

Duncan Reid was now very pale.

He seemed to wish to escape the observation of those about him, and said quickly:

"Come, we will go together at once."

Nick Burton was perfectly calm, but his eyes seemed on fire, and wheeling on his heel he accompanied his superior officer out of the inn, the crowd following them with their eyes and several remarking that the young middy had war in his look, and if he had cause of quarrel with Lieutenant Reid he meant to settle it in his own way.

Leaving the inn together, Nick led the way up the street leading to the Rowland Manor.

For a short distance neither spoke, and then Duncan Reid said in a deprecating tone:

"Burton, what is the cause of quarrel you have against me?"

"I consider a man who would write an anonymous letter against a brother officer, slandering him in the eyes of the woman of his love, as one who is coward enough to stab him in the back," were the stinging words of the young sailor.

"And who has done this?"

"You have."

"It is false, whoever says it."

"It is the truth, for I have your letter, written me some weeks ago, and the anonymous letter to which I refer."

"Both are written on the same kind of paper, and, tracing the writing of each, I find one a disguise of the other."

"The anonymous letter came from Boston, and you are just from there."

"You have sworn to marry Miss Ruth Rowland, and you got yourself ordered here, through family influence, and had me ordered away."

"I tell you, Duncan Reid, you are a liar, a coward, and you would be an assassin did I give you the opportunity to strike me in the back."

Duncan Reid seemed almost stunned by the intensity of his rival's passion, but gasped out:

"You shall answer for your insulting words, Light-house Nick."

"Ay, ay, sir, I shall force you to keep that threat, for before darkness comes again I will meet you upon the field of honor to punish you for your perfidy."

"Go, coward! for your superior officer, a gentleman, not knowing you as the low brute you are, awaits you," and with these taunting words Nick Burton turned upon his heel and walked rapidly away in the direction of the Rowland Mansion.

Duncan Reid stood an instant in deep and painful thought, for never before had such words been addressed to him.

Rich, of a good old family that wielded vast

influence, and an only son, he had pretty much had his own way, on shore and afloat.

He had been toadied, too, by his brother officers whom he could bully, and he was overbearing and haughty toward many.

He had loved Ruth Rowland at first sight, and knowing that she was the heiress to vast wealth, he had sworn to marry her.

When it was known that Nick was his rival, he had laughed at the idea, but finding that he had a strong hold upon the affections of the beautiful girl he at once determined to win her from him by foul means as he could not do so by fair.

He had asked Doctor Rowland for the hand of his daughter, and the reply had been that she was pledged to Nick Burton, but that he, the doctor, believed the attachment not to be very strong, and that he preferred his daughter should marry one of Mr. Reid's good fame, rather than a youth who had become known as Nick, the Light-house Boy.

Under such prospects, Lieutenant Duncan Reid made up his mind that he would go in and win.

He was well aware that Nick Burton was a dangerous man to arouse, and he determined to be cautious, so was considerably taken aback when the youth had confronted him with his underhand work against him, and boldly dared him to meet him in mortal combat.

Nick Burton was not a man that Duncan Reid could frighten, and the lieutenant knew that fact well, so he walked on his way moodily, wondering if the affair could not be amicably settled by his withdrawing from the field, for though he wanted to win Ruth, he did not wish to lose his own life.

The street he was on wound among some pleasant houses just there, and was quite dark from the overhanging trees that bordered the way.

Suddenly, just as the lights of the Rowland Mansion came in sight he saw a form advancing toward him.

The light from a cottage window near by shed a ray across the street and he caught sight of a tall form attired in naval uniform.

The moment after came a flash, almost in his face, a report, and Lieutenant Duncan Reid staggered backward and fell heavily, the cry upon his lips:

"Burton, my God! you have killed me."

Alarmed by the report several people darted out of the house and to the side of the dying man, who said in a faint voice:

"Nick Burton, midshipman on the *Barkaway*, is my murderer!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FLIGHT OF THE ASSASSIN.

THE alarm was quickly given, by those who had come to the side of the dying lieutenant, and while he was borne into the house, near where he had fallen, word was sent on board the *Barkaway* to inform Lieutenant Mabrey.

There the messenger was told that the lieutenant was spending the day at Doctor Rowland's, and he was sent thither.

But, as Doctor Rowland was the nearest physician, although he did not practice, in a case of that kind, word was sent to him to ask that he would kindly come to see the wounded lieutenant.

In dismay the three seated in the parlor, Doctor Rowland, Lieutenant Mabrey, and Ruth, heard what was said.

"Do you mean that Lieutenant Duncan Reid has been shot?" asked the doctor of the young man, who brought the news, and who was recognized as a neighbor.

"Yes, sir."

"And by whom?"

"I think he accused a brother officer, sir, but I did not hear whom."

"My life on it that Nick Burton has done this coward deed."

"I will come at once—come, Mabrey," and Doctor Rowland seized his hat and calling to a servant to bring his case of surgical instruments he hastily left the mansion, accompanied by Calvin Mabrey.

As for Ruth, she had heard the news without a cry.

Her face became like marble, and all the color faded from her lips, so that she looked stern and haggard.

After her father uttered the words regarding her lover she tried to speak but could not.

When Lieutenant Mabrey bowed a farewell she did not notice him, and then, when the door closed upon the receding forms of her father and the officer she sunk down upon the carpet in a swoon.

Her faithful maid Agnes rushed to her aid, and she was borne to her room and soon revived under restoratives administered by the old housekeeper.

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon poor Nick, if in his mad jealousy he has done this awful deed," groaned poor Ruth.

"Mr. Burton did do it, Miss Ruth, for as I came home with Sancha, my beau, I saw him standing on the opposite side of the street with Lieutenant Reid, whom I knew by his voice, and they were quarreling, and I heard Mister Nick

say as how he should not live until another night, or something like that, and Sancha hurried me on for I was scared, and I meant to tell you to-night, Miss Ruth, just what I saw and heard."

"I cannot believe it," cried Ruth, and she tried to school her heart to so feel.

But before very long her father came home, and, springing from the couch upon which she was lying, her hands clasped over her eyes, she ran down-stairs and threw herself into his arms, while she cried:

"Oh, father! tell me just what has happened?"

"Lieutenant Duncan Reid, one of the most brilliant young officers in the service, is dead, Ruth," was the cold reply.

"Dead?" she gasped.

"So I said."

"And who killed him?"

"His murderer was your lover, Nicholas Burton."

"It is false! Nick Burton did not kill him."

"It is true, for Duncan Reid said so with dying breath."

"Then they met in a duel and he fell."

"That is not so, for there was no duel."

"No duel?" groaned Ruth.

"No, they had a quarrel and Burton left him, with a threat upon his lips."

"Duncan Reid continued on his way here, when suddenly, opposite Saunders's house he saw Nick Burton approaching him."

"There came a flash and report and he fell, fatally wounded."

"Such is Reid's dying confession, and it will hang your lover," and the doctor gave a light, sneering laugh.

"It is false! Nick Burton is no assassin, and I will not believe even the dying statements of Duncan Reid that he is," was the impetuous response of Ruth.

"My child, God knows I pity your unbelief, but you will yet have it proven to you that you have loved unwisely."

"Never!"

"I never liked that young man, I confess it; but I saw, Ruth, that your heart was deeply interested, and, for your happiness I allowed matters to take their course; but all has come out as I feared."

"No, no, father, I cannot, I will not believe it."

"You would doubt the testimony of a dying man, you would believe that lips now cold in death, had died with a lie upon them?"

"Yes, when that man was Duncan Reid, whose hatred for poor Nick I well know."

"Well, time will show which is right, you or I."

"Yes, father, time will show; but where is Nick now?"

"On board his vessel, I suppose, awaiting the consequences of his evil, cowardly act."

"And what will be the consequences, father, if it is proven against him?"

"Ah! you already begin to waver."

"No, sir, I do not; but I wish to know what will be his fate if they swear his life away, as they did once before, when you know that he was proven innocent."

"I am not so sure of his innocence; but he will be shot to death by a platoon of marines, for he has killed his superior officer, and more, assassinated him."

Ruth groaned in agony of spirit and then going to her room wrote the following note:

"MY POOR, DEAR NICK:—

"The plot ripened sooner, far sooner against you than I could have believed, for I am sure that in all this there is a plot against you."

"I believe you true, I believe you innocent, and let this give you strength to bear up under your sorrows, and know that there will be one who will work hard for your release."

"Ever devotedly

"Your own

"RUTH."

Calling Agnes she sent her out to give the letter to the groom, along with a golden eagle, that he might be the more encouraged to find the one to whom it was addressed.

"Tell him to take my boat and row out to the schooner-of-war *Barkaway*, and that he will find Midshipman Burton there, doubtless," Ruth said.

Agnes departed, and soon after returned, having delivered the message and letter and seen the groom off on his errand.

It was but a short while before the house-girl came up and asked for Agnes, who descended to the kitchen to see what was wanted with her.

She soon returned and made known to Ruth that Bob the groom had come upon Midshipman Burton upon the Rowland pier, and had given him the letter.

"Thank Heaven that he will now know I am true to him," said Ruth, and wearied out with the excitement she had gone through she sought rest.

Joining her father at breakfast the next morning, she saw that his face was very stern.

"Is there any news of Nick, father?" she asked falteringly.

"Yes."

"Will you not tell it me?"

"It is about what I expected of him," said the doctor with a sneer.

"Oh, father! do not keep me in suspense, for do you not see how I suffer?"

"Well, I have just had a letter from Mabrey, who states that Burton has taken flight to save himself from the yard-arm."

"Heaven have mercy!" broke from the lips of the poor girl, and she sunk upon the floor in a deep swoon.

CHAPTER XV.

AFTER THE STORM.

WHEN the sun arose, the morning after the fierce storm, in which Island Nell had proven herself such a heroine, the little *Scud* was flying along toward home, and within half a mile of the anchorage in the basin.

Old Neptune had felt his cabin rock under the savage blasts of the tempest, his dogs had howled dismally, the cats had kept up a constant whine, the birds had chattered and Poll, the parrot, had shouted all night, in his sharp voice:

"Boat ahoy! bad night out!"

"Sea rough! Nell, you, Nell! Come home! Awful storm! Nell, oh, Nell!"

Under these circumstances, and with the savage roar of the surf constantly in his ears, Old Neptune had been unable to sleep.

He was most anxious about Island Nell, and though he knew that she was well able to take care of herself, he yet feared that she had attempted to run home, and in the darkness had come to grief.

Several times he went out upon the bluff to see if he could catch sight of the light of the *Scud*; but the savage tempest drove him in again.

He was up with the first glimmer of day, and had his glass leveled out over the waters toward the island where he expected that Nell had sought a haven for the night.

He saw no sail in sight, and, disappointed and alarmed, he was glancing over the bay, when his eyes fell upon the *Scud*, flying along homeward, but from a direction from which he had not expected to see it coming.

In real glee he clapped his hands and laughed merrily, while his dark, sad old face lighted up with a glow of pleasure.

"Sail ho! boat ahoy! Nell ahoy! Nell coming!" shrieked Poll, as his bright eyes also saw the *Scud*.

Going down to the shore, Old Neptune awaited the coming of Nell, and springing into a row-boat, he was alongside of the *Scud* just as she luffed up and let go her anchor.

The *Scud* showed that she had been stripped for work.

Not an unnecessary rope or article was in sight, and Nell looked pale and haggard.

"Oh, grandpa! I am so tired!" she said as she let the sail come down with a rush and got into the boat with him.

Old Neptune had already built a fire, and had made preparations for breakfast, and Nell, after a short rest got the meal ready.

Then, as the two sat down to eat with the dumb brutes around them, Nell told her grandfather of her adventures, but did not mention the fact of Sailor Jack Downes being an officer, hunting for proof of Nick Burton's being in league with pirates.

The old man scolded her mildly for going to the rescue of the wrecked seamen, and then proposed, after she had rested, that they should run over and see the wreck.

The food and a couple of hours' rest made Nell as fresh as ever, and she soon had the *Scud* ready, and her grandfather coming on board, they set sail for the part of the coast where they supposed the wreck had driven.

Running out of an inlet in spite of the rough sea, they looked up and down the coast for some sign of the wreck.

But nowhere was it visible.

"That tempest last night pounded her into atoms, Nell," said Old Neptune.

"If it had, there would have been some of the wreck on the beach, grandpa."

"That's so, child."

"As there is not, I think she must have struck the inlet above here and driven squarely into it."

"If not, she has gone to the bottom."

"You are right, Nell; it is either one or the other."

"Then through the inlet we go in search," and the *Scud* was headed for the inlet a mile above, or rather a pass between two of the islands.

Into the breakers plunged the *Scud*, and shaking the waves from her decks, she glided into the inlet channel and soon rounded a point of land to discover the wreck ashore upon a small island.

The water permitted Nell to make a good landing alongside of the wreck, and she and her father sprang on board.

There was considerable in the wreck, and undamaged, to repay the hermits for their trouble, and, in searching about the cabin, Old Neptune came upon a secret locker, in which was a tin box.

It looked as though it had been buried in the

ground, for it was dirt-stained and rusty, so much so that some engraving upon the top had become almost entirely effaced.

There was a padlock upon it, but no key, and Old Neptune carefully stowed it away in the Scud.

From the stores found on board, it was very evident that Bronx and Sport had lived in luxury on the run across the Atlantic, and these were very acceptable to the larder of the hermits, and Old Neptune said:

"Not a bad find, my child, for there is enough here to keep us for months."

Having taken the stores all out, they ran the Scud well loaded back to the island, and then Nell returned in the afternoon for the furniture that was upon the wreck, while Old Neptune put away the things that had been brought.

As Nell was going out with an armful of bedding, having put all else upon the Scud which she cared to take, she suddenly beheld in the companionway the form of a man.

He was a rough-looking fellow, dressed in sailor costume and armed.

Nell paused at the bottom of the steps, and said:

"Well, who are you, and what do you want here?"

"I are one o' the Casco Wreckers, gal, and it are fer me ter ax you what yer is doing here?" was the rude reply.

"I am taking from this wreck what things I need, as I have a right to do—and don't you interfere with me!" was the plucky response.

"You has no right to them things, gal, for this wreck are mine, and I jist gives yer one minute to git out," said the wrecker, at the same time drawing a long-bladed knife.

CHAPTER XVI. A FAVOR RETURNED.

NELL knew no such word as fear, yet she felt that she was at the mercy of the wretch, should he attack her in the cabin.

She knew that the Casco Wreckers had a retreat far down the coast, and were known as a wicked, dangerous lot.

They pretended to be fishermen, but they were suspected of being smugglers, and even pirates as well, while they were known to be wreckers.

Some said that they set false beacons at times, and had lured many a vessel to destruction; but certain it was, after a storm, their small smacks patrolled the coast in search of booty.

As the wrecker drew his knife Nell did not flinch, but threw down the armful of things she had and stepped back into the cabin, looking for some means of defense.

As she did so the wrecker sprung down the companionway, and behind him came a comrade.

Nell hastily seized an old cutlass that hung in the forward end of the cabin, and stood at bay, while the wrecker snatched a sword from the hand of his companion and advanced toward her.

"I will defend my life, Sir Wrecker, even if I take yours!" cried Island Nell, the Hermit, as the two blades crossed with a ringing clash.

The wrecker was amazed at the bold front presented by the girl, but crossed her blade, intending to quickly disarm her, while his comrade cried out:

"Don't harm her, Ike, for that is Island Nell, the granddaughter of Old Neptune, the Hermit, and there's money on her."

But hardly were the words of warning out of his mouth when the blade of his comrade was struck from his hand, and Nell had proven herself mistress of the situation.

"Curses! she handles a blade like a navy officer, ter disarm me that way," growled the discomfited wrecker, but he continued:

"Gal, we know who you is, and that your grandad hes the gold to pay for your ransom; so we'll jist take you in, and send him word where he can buy you out o' limbo."

"Come; if you don't give in it will be the worst for you, as my pard and me kin clip yer claws in short order."

"I will not surrender, and I warn you off!" said the brave girl, still standing upon her guard.

The men hesitated.

One of them had found the girl too skillful in the use of a sword, and he did not wish to give her a chance to use her blade upon him.

The other was also afraid of her; but suddenly his eyes fell upon the bundle of bedding which the fair Hermitess had thrown down, and seizing it quickly, he threw it upon her, the weight catching her sword point and bearing it down.

In an instant they had sprung forward and each seized an arm of their girl adversary.

Hardly had the two men seized the girl, when the deep report of a pistol filled the cabin, and as one of the wreckers fell dead in his tracks, a man bounded down the companionway, and confronted the other, at the same time seizing the blade lying upon the floor.

The other wrecker picked up the cutlass which Nell had dropped, and in an instant the two blades clashed and a hot fight was begun.

Island Nell uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the intruder who had so unexpectedly and well-timed come to her rescue, and stood watching the sword duello with deepest interest.

It was, however, of short duration, for the stranger struck up the blade of the wrecker and drove his own weapon through his body, releasing his hold upon the hilt and allowing it to remain as the villain, with a deep moan sunk upon the floor.

"Well, sweet friend, we meet again, and happy am I to return the favor in part which you did me last night."

"Ah! do you now remember me?"

"Well, I ran down the coast in a small craft, hoping to find our old wreck, and get from it a valuable box which Bronx had thoughtlessly left on board."

"Have you seen such a box, for it contains important papers, Bronx said, and he dug it up a few days ago at a point where we landed, he having, with one other, buried it there some time ago."

"Are you still frightened, for you look so?"

Nell stood still, gazing at her rescuer, her face pale and a strange look upon it.

She had been forward when her grandfather had found the box, and had not seen it, or noticed it, among the other things, and now said:

"Oh, sir, we, my grandfather and I, have been taking your things off the wreck; but we did not believe they would be sought after, and you shall have them all again, and my sloop to take them up to the town."

"No, no; the old wreck and all in it are yours, excepting the box."

"I did not see the box you speak of, sir."

"Well, it was of little value, I guess, anyhow, and I shall tell Bronx the old hull has gone to pieces."

"It will, sir, when it drifts off this point with the tide; but how did you get here?"

"I ran down the coast in a small smack."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"And how did you get in here?"

"I ran through the inlet."

"Oh, sir! you ran a terrible risk, and just by accident was it you escaped, for it was very reckless of you."

"I have a way of doing reckless things, my sweet girl; but it seems, if I could know you, I would become a different man, for you have angel written on every feature of your face."

"You must not talk to me that way, sir; but let me tell you how I thank you for saving me from those men, for they are wicked wreckers."

"Are they both dead?" and Nell looked at them with a shudder.

"Oh, yes, for I do my work well when I have to; but will you not allow me to assist you in getting the things on your little craft?"

"No, thank you, sir, for I have all that I care to take."

"Again I thank you, sir, and must say good-by."

"I will return and bury those men when you are not here."

"Permit me to save you the trouble and give them a sailor's burial," and seizing each one of the bodies by the clothing, with a strength that was marvelous, he dragged them up the companionway, and, ere Nell understood his intention, overboard he threw them into the sea.

"Oh, sir!" said Island Nell, horrified.

"They were too wicked to lose time digging graves for them, so let the sea have them," he said, in his light, off-hand way.

"Good-by, sir," and Nell went toward the side and sprung over upon the deck of the Scud.

Not far away was the smack which the Sport had come in, also fastened to the wreck, and, lying half-drawn up upon the beach was the surf skiff of the two wreckers, its leg-of-mutton sail still hoisted.

"I will not drive you away from the wreck, to which you are certainly entitled, so bid you farewell, sweet Island Nell, for I believe such is your name."

"But we shall meet again," and Sport kissed his hand gallantly and springing on board his Smack cast her loose.

"Oh, sir, you cannot find your way out of here, so I will pilot you to open water, as you will not be able to get out to sea against this tide."

"Follow in my wake, please, sir."

Nell gave her sail to the wind and the Scud darted away, Sport putting about and following her.

The Scud could have run away from the Smack, but Nell eased off her sheet and kept just far enough ahead to prevent conversation, which the handsome young man seemed anxious to carry on.

After piloting him through the devious channel among the islands, she came to where the bay opened into a broad sheet of water, and then luffing up allowed him to come near, when she called out:

"By watching the color of the water, sir, as I see you are a good sailor, you can pick your way back to the city."

"Good by, sir," and the sheet was turned in closer and the Scud darted away.

"Good-by, sweet Nell; we shall meet again," called out the young gambler, and then he said to himself:

"That girl has turned my head completely, or I never would have insisted upon risking my life to run down this savage coast and look the wreck up, when Bronx said he had left that old tin box on board."

"Well, I arrived just in time to save her from those devilish wreckers, and though I have repaid my debt of life I owed her, I have become infatuated with her, that is certain."

"Yes, and this is not the end of it."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MYSTERIOUS LUGGER.

ISLAND NELL did not get back home until after dark.

She found her grandfather anxious about her, for the old man hated to have her away from him of late.

Worn out with their loss of rest the night before, and their hard day's work, the two retired early, leaving the cargo still upon the Scud.

Nell told Old Neptune of the attack upon her by the wreckers, and they concluded to go the next day and see if the wreck was still there, and also to set the boat of the wreckers adrift.

After a good night's rest they were up betimes, had their breakfast and the Scud was unloaded.

Then they set sail for the island where the wreck had stranded, and found that the old bulk had floated off with the high tide of the night and disappeared.

The surf skiff of the wreckers were also gone, it not having been made fast, and so the Scud was headed for home again.

The things found upon the wreck were then carefully stored, and the furniture added greatly to the comfort of their home, and it presented a very cosy appearance.

The old Hermit had hidden the tin box away, and for some reason, did not speak to Nell of having found it, when she told him that the handsome young sailor had risked his life to come in search of it.

With their island guarded as it was, by an impassable reef wall, excepting two channels, which had to be well known, even to run a skiff through, their brass howitzer commanding this entrance, and their dogs to keep watch by night and the parrot by day, neither Old Neptune or Island Nell felt any dread of a visit either from friend or foe.

The soil they tilled for corn, potatoes and other vegetables, and, with very little work it yielded a most generous harvest.

The waters furnished them with all the fish they needed, the woods about them were full of game, and upon the other islands nearer the mainland Nell had often shot deer, and on a number of occasions brought a bear home.

Hares and squirrels were abundant, and water-fowl filled the waters.

With all these supplies of fish, game and fowl at hand, and which they took good care to preserve for winter use, and a well-filled larder, the Hermits of Casco Bay were in no danger of starvation.

There were books in plenty, for reading on the long winter evenings, Nell's guitar for her to amuse herself with, her rifle for hunting, her rod and net for fishing, her skates and snowshoes, her yacht and row-boats, and her sled, on which the two large dogs were wont to take her skimming over the ice.

Then Nell was no mean artist, and she sketched scenes about her, and life by no means passed wearily to her, though in her heart she carried the cross of unrequited love, for she had loved Nick Burton with all the strength of her ardent and wild nature.

Having now painted the home life of the Casco Hermits for the reader, I will bring before them a scene which occurred the day after the murder of Lieutenant Duncan Reid.

A week or more had passed since the fearful storm, and the rescue of Bronx and Sport, and affairs were going along in their usual even tenor upon Hermit's Isle, when one afternoon Poll, who was allowed his freedom, and was wont to perch upon a high tree and act as lookout at the mast-head, shouted out in his squeaky tones:

"Sail ho! boat ahoy! sail ho!"

"Whereaway, Poll?" called out Nell, who knew all the nautical terms, her grandfather having taught her all about a sea life, and besides, educated her not only in book learning, but in the use of fire-arms and a sword.

"Dead ahead! boat ahoy! sail ho!" yelled Poll, who always faced toward the object he had descried, and knew that position to be dead ahead.

"Ay, ay, Poll. I'll get my glass and see how she is bearing, and what she looks like," called out Nell, while her grandfather slumbered peacefully in a hammock, and the dogs lay beneath following his example.

"Dead ahead! sail ho!" shouted Poll.

Going to the edge of the thicket, which bordered the bluff, Nell saw a craft about a mile distant.

It was a lubberly looking lugger, and she was coming slowly along down the bay, under easy

sail, and heading on a course that must bring her dangerously near the island reef.

Upon her decks she saw five men.

She did not remember to have seen the vessel before, and she knew that, if it attempted to go further down the bay than beyond the island, it would come to grief, unless there was a good pilot on board, and pilots for those waters she knew were strangely scarce.

As the lugger drew nearer, Nell felt that their destination was the island, for those on her decks were eying the island closely, several of them with glasses, and that there was no pilot on board she was convinced by the slow manner in which the craft was sailing, while she now observed a man at the masthead who seemed to be picking out the course by the water's color, and giving directions to the man at the helm.

"I will call grandpa," said Nell, and the old man was soon watching the coming lugger, while Poll kept up a continuous cry of "Boat ahoy! sail, ho! hard a port!"

"What do you make of her, grandpa?" asked Nell.

"I do not know; she is a clumsy tub, and I can see no reason why she is in these waters: but we will soon know, and we'll prepare for them too, child."

The old man walked down to the howitzer and cleared it for action.

It was mounted in an embrasure, with high earth-works about it, a miniature fort, so as to protect any one that was manning it.

The piece was swabbed out, the magazine unfastened, some grape and solid shot gotten ready and all preparations made to meet a foe.

Then there were half a dozen rifles and muskets, not to speak of small-arms, up at the cabin; these were looked over, though they were always kept ready for use.

"I guess if they are foes we can make it too hot for them," said Old Neptune, and he walked over to the bluff with Nell, to see what the lugger was about.

She had shortened sail still more, and evidently knowing that it was dangerous to venture too near the sunken reef wall, she was keeping at a safe distance.

Seeing the old Hermit and Nell upon the bluff, a voice now hailed with:

"Ho the Hermit's Isle!"

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted back Nell's clear tones.

"We wish to come ashore and see you."

"No one is allowed to land upon this island, and visitors are not welcome," said Nell in a decided voice.

"We have business calling us up the bay and we need a pilot."

"Who are you?"

"I am a Government officer, bound upon special service," was the answer.

"Why did you not take a small cutter, or armed yacht, instead of that tub?" pertly asked Nell.

"Because my duties are such I cared not to attract attention."

"It is urgent that I should go down the bay, and I'll pay handsomely if you will be our pilot, for we came here to seek you as such, if you are Island Nell."

"I am Island Nell, and I will act as your pilot, but I will not accept your gold."

"I thank you, and I shall claim your services."

"Will you come out to us?"

"Yes."

Nell then turned to her grandfather and asked his opinion of her act.

"If he is a Government officer, Nell, and he talks squarely, you will have to serve him; but do not go on board."

"How can I do then, grandpa?"

"Go in the Scud, shorten sail and let him follow in our wake."

"Should they be treacherous, we have it in our power to escape them."

"Do you mean that you shall go?"

"Yes, for I do not wish to see you go alone."

"Do not fear for me, grandpa, for I can take care of myself and it will not do for you to take the trip."

"I will be back just as soon as I can, and I'll not let one of them come near the Scud, so you must remain here."

"All right, my-child, just as you say," said the old man who was always influenced by the girl.

Going down to the basin Nell soon had the Scud in readiness, kissed her grandfather goodbye and ran out of the circuitous channel to open water, those on the lugger watching her with admiration at her skill.

As she stood down toward the lugger the same voice hailed:

"How will you get your smack back, as you are alone?"

"I shall go in my smack," responded Nell.

"What, as pilot?"

"Certainly, for you can follow in my wake."

"I am ready, come on!"

Whatever those on the lugger thought of this maneuver on the part of the daring girl they had to submit to it, and the lubberly craft followed slowly in the wake of the nimble Scud.

Having ascertained from the skipper of the

lugger about where he wished to go, the young girl led the way, sailing along with a slack sheet to keep from dropping the lugger, which now, with one ahead who knew the waters, showed a speed which Island Nell had not believed possible.

When supper-time came Nell received an invitation to board the lugger, but she shouted back that she had her supper ready, and proceeded forthwith to eat it with one hand while she sailed her boat with the other.

Soon after darkness fell, and Nell lighted her lamps so that the lugger could readily follow her, and kept on her course, dropping back a trifle nearer as they were in dangerous waters then.

Until after midnight Nell held on, and then came to the island which the skipper of the lugger had said he wished to reach.

It was a huge island, rising abruptly out of the waters, and with a bold, rugged hill on one side and another in the center.

A thick growth of pines and other trees covered it, and it was at that day called the Haunted Island, from the fact that there was a legend connected with it that the remnant of a tribe of Indians, beaten in battle, had taken refuge there, and, finding that they must starve or be massacred by their foes, had all walked into the sea one night and perished.

Superstitious people said that nightly this brave but desperate band of Indians, or spirit forms, could be seen gliding about the island in weird canoes, and that their wailing echoed through the pines as they chanted their death-songs.

For this reason the island was said to be haunted, and no fisherman would ever cruise near the dreaded spot.

What had brought the Government officer to that neighborhood Nell could not tell, but supposed he had come there to look for smugglers.

Watching the lugger, she saw a boat leave its side and pull toward the island, and then the voice that had before addressed her was heard hailing.

"Ay, ay, sir!" answered Nell.

"We are ready to return now."

"Why, your boat has just pulled ashore," said Nell, in surprise.

"All right, we are ready to go back."

"And leave those in your boat?" asked the amazed girl.

"Yes."

"I will not pilot you back if you desert those men," was the firm response.

"My dear girl, those in that boat came here to stay, as you can find out by hailing and asking them, for they are still within hearing."

"Why they remain I cannot explain to you, for they are on secret service, and I do not wish you to speak of it, as thereby you might thwart the very motive of our coming here. Are you satisfied with my explanation?"

"Yes," answered Nell, not exactly satisfied, and wondering greatly at the mysterious cruise of the lugger.

But she said no more, and headed homeward.

The wind had increased toward midnight, and the two vessels went back at a swift pace, and before noon of the next day Nell hailed the lugger, pointed out the course she was to steer to return to port, and then giving the Scud a free sheet, flew off toward her island retreat, unmindful of the thanks shouted after her by the one she had served on the mysterious lugger.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DOCTOR ROWLAND'S CLEW.

It was all excitement in the town of Portland.

Nick Burton the hero had again gotten into trouble, and wise heads this time could not see how he could explain away his act.

He had been seen in the hotel asking for Lieutenant Duncan Reid.

He had been known to have gone there to seek him, burning with indignation at having him step into his place on the Barkaway.

The meeting between the two had been witnessed by many, and all saw that Nick Burton refused to take his superior officer's hand, and heard the words that passed between them.

Lieutenant Mabrey had sent the midshipman, to bring Duncan Reid to the home of Doctor Rowland.

They had been seen walking together and evidently in angry mood.

They had passed up to the part of the street where the residences were few and far between, and the way dark and lonesome from overhanging trees.

There, the dying officer stated he had parted with Nick Burton, who threatened that, before another night he would make him repent his act in coming to Portland to displace him in his berth there.

Then Lieutenant Reid went on in his dying confession:

"Having told me that Lieutenant Mabrey awaited me at the residence of Doctor Rowland, thither I continued my way, when suddenly I saw a man approaching."

"Burton had gone in that direction, and, by

the lights streaming from a house on the road-side, I recognized him returning."

"His step was quick, and, just as he drew near, as I stepped aside to avoid his running against me, when a flash came and I fell mortally wounded, while my assassin passed on."

With what had occurred between them, and the dying confession of Duncan Reid, but one person in the town doubted but that Nick Burton the middy was the murderer.

Lieutenant Mabrey at once, after hearing the officer's dying statement, went on board the Barkaway, and his first question was:

"Has Burton come on board?"

"No, sir."

"Then he must be hunted down," and a dozen marines under two middies were ordered ashore at once, while word was sent to the town officials to make all search at once for the fugitive, for it was believed that Nick, knowing the consequences of his evil act, would at once seek safety in flight.

The groom of Rowland Manor told how he had seen him on the pier, but did not speak of having given him a note from Ruth.

The morning broke, but Nick Burton could not be found, and, though all day long the search for him continued, it proved to be fruitless.

The next day Doctor Rowland visited the Barkaway, and was met at the gangway by Lieutenant Mabrey, who asked quickly:

"Any tidings?"

"None, but I think I have a clew, Mabrey."

"Well, doctor?"

"For that reason I came out to see you."

"I'll be at your service to carry out any idea you have, sir; but how is Miss Ruth?"

"She goes about the house like a ghost, pale and really stern in her manner and words."

"The blow has been a severe one to her; but she still professes to believe Burton innocent."

"In the face of Duncan Reid's dying confession?"

"Yes, she says that she has more faith in the noble character of that mad boy, than in the dying words of Reid; but she is shaken in her trust, I feel confident, though she will not acknowledge it."

"I feel sorry for her, and I admire the great trust she holds in one she loves."

"I confess myself, from what I know of Burton, I would not have believed him guilty of such a dastard act, but for the statement of poor Reid."

"He doubtless acted from impulse, drawing his weapon and firing, driven to it by his bitter disappointment."

"I suppose such was the case, and, though I shall make a thorough search for him, I hope he will not be found, as it would be a fearful thing for me to do, to have to hang that young man at the yard-arm, as I shall have to do if we capture him."

"Well, he took his life in his own hands, when he acted as he did, and he must bear the consequences."

"You said you had a clew, doctor, so let me know it, for I must do my duty," sadly said Calvin Mabrey.

"Yes, when he was a prisoner before, accused of piracy, his devoted friend through all was that strange girl, Island Nell."

"After she had rescued him, she hoped to win his love; but he was devoted to my daughter, and Island Nell and her old Hermit grandfather, left the Light-house Island, and sought another home."

They went further down the coast to a large island, said to be inaccessible save to herself and Nick Burton, who knew the channel leading in through the reefs."

"Now, what more probable, than after his act, he should go back to her?"

"It would seem so, if he felt that he could trust her; but you know the old adage:

"'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.'"

"True, but she would be glad enough to get him back to her, and I believe that he has gone there."

"It may be."

"The island no one visits, and it is large, and there are ample means of his hiding there."

"As I lost a small sailing-craft the night of Burton's disappearance, and as the boatman cannot account for its disappearance, it seems to me that the clew I have is a strong one."

"It does seem so, doctor, and I am willing to carry it out."

"I will accompany you, for I know these waters well enough to be a pilot down to the Hermit's Isle, but not beyond."

"We can start as soon as you wish, taking my little yacht, the Ruth, and run down there by midnight, where, if the weather is calm, as it promises to be, we can land certainly in a reef skiff and pounce upon the cabin before they are aware of our coming, and I feel confident that right there will we find this red-handed murderer."

"We can but try, sir, and I'll row up now to your pier, with six well-armed seamen."

Ten minutes after a boat left the schooner containing six oarsmen, a coxswain, the lieutenant and Doctor Rowland.

Arriving at the Rowland pier, they left the boat for the trim little yacht *Ruth*, which soon after set sail for Hermit's Island, to see if Doctor Rowland's clew was correct, that Nick Burton had taken refuge there.

CHAPTER XIX.

IN THE DEVIL'S TEA-KETTLE.

THE sun was setting, as the last view of Portland was obtained by those upon the yacht *Ruth*, that went bowling along down the bay at a merry pace, Doctor Rowland at the tiller; for he had cruised in the immediate waters to the town for years, and felt his ability to go for leagues without coming to grief.

A bright starlight night followed the close of day, and out of a six-knot breeze that was blowing steadily, the *Ruth* managed to make even more, for she was a fleet sailer.

The islands were passed one by one, and in little groups—silent, dark and deserted, save by wild beasts and by water-fowl, an occasional bark of a wolf, yelp of a fox, or hoot of an owl alone breaking the stillness of the night.

It was after midnight when the Hermit's Isle loomed up ahead, and there too all was dark and dismal.

The roar of the waves, right though they were upon the reef, was heard, warning the helmsman not to approach too near.

But there was a line of white visible some distance off shore, encircling the island, and this all knew was a barrier they could not pass except through the known channel.

This they were anxious to find, intending to anchor the *Ruth* and land in the surf skiff, leaving two of the seamen on board the little vessel as a guard.

As they headed close in toward the reef, to sail around it, watching for an entrance, the deep bay of a dog broke the silence, followed immediately afterward by another joining in the chorus of alarm.

"Perdition take the brutes! they will give the alarm," said Doctor Rowland almost with savage earnestness.

"There's a break ahead, sir," said the coxswain, who was standing in the bows, watching the reef closely.

"Ay, ay, I see it now, coxswain; we will anchor yonder," answered the doctor.

The yacht ran up opposite to the break in the reef, and then luffed, and the anchor was noiselessly dropped into the water.

The depth surprised them, but at last it reached bottom, and as the two men were to be left upon the yacht, and the wind was not very fresh, they concluded to have the sails up, for the creaking of the blocks might be heard, and cause alarm, where the barking of the dogs had failed to do so.

The two dogs had ceased their deep baying, and now all was quiet upon the island.

The surf skiff in tow was then hauled alongside, and then Lieutenant Mabrey, Doctor Rowland, the coxswain and five of the seamen entered it, one sailor remaining on board, as he was deemed sufficient to serve as guard, and it was feared that if surprised, Nick Burton would be aided by the old Hermit and Island Nell in making a desperate resistance, and certainly they would form a dangerous trio.

As no one now knew the channel, Doctor Rowland took his stand in the bows of the skiff, while Lieutenant Mabrey held the tiller, and the oarsmen gave way with a long, steady pull, the coxswain lending a hand with an oar.

A row of a couple of cable's lengths brought the boat near the break in the reef, and all were surprised to discover how great a surf was there with so light a wind.

The tide seemed to rush through like a mill-race, and the waters seethed like a boiling caldron.

Each realized the danger of the undertaking, for an upset there meant death.

The men rowed slowly, and with great steadiness; Doctor Rowland kept his eyes fixed ahead, watching for dangers, and Lieutenant Mabrey held the tiller firmly in hand.

"Put back!" cried the doctor, and the order was obeyed just in time to save the bows from crashing upon a pointed rock that hardly rose above the surface.

As it was, the starboard oars struck it hard, and two of them snapped off.

Ere one of the port oarsmen could throw his oar to starboard, the surf skiff was wheeled half-around in the vortex, and, whirled away out of the channel, struck heavily upon one side, to then dash upon a rock upon the other.

All had occurred too quickly for an order to be given, and as the water poured into the boat through its shattered sides, every one realized that death was close at hand, for to swim in that wild whirlpool, with jagged rocks and sunken reefs on all sides seemed impossible.

"Strive and reach yonder rock!"

"Pull hard, men, for our lives!" cried Lieutenant Mabrey, as his gaze fell upon a large rock not far away, over which the waves were dashing.

"Ay, ay, sir," was the cheery answer, and the men tugged hard at the oars, to dash direct-

ly upon a sunken rock and split their boat in pieces.

A shout of despair went up, as they were dashed into the waters, and, just then, like a specter, a white surf skiff glided into their midst, and a clear voice cried:

"Cheer up, men, for I can save you!"

The struggling men grasped at the gunwales of the skiff, and one by one were drawn on board, until five had been saved.

"Are these all?" quietly asked the one who had so unexpectedly come to their rescue.

"No, for there are but five here, and there were eight of us in the boat."

"Three of your party are lost then, and you are lucky that all were not, for you had gone right into the Devil's Tea-Kettle, and no man can swim here."

"Ah!" and the speaker put the helm down quickly, and just missed a sunken rock.

The next instant the surf skiff darted out into the channel, and Lieutenant Mabrey asked:

"Are you Island Nell?"

"I am, sir," was the prompt reply.

"I saw your danger, and came to your rescue."

CHAPTER XX.

THE SKIFF.

"We certainly appreciate your noble and daring act, miss, in coming to our aid, and I thank you from my heart for the life you have saved, and feel that my comrades are equally as grateful," said Lieutenant Mabrey, warmly, while Doctor Rowland added:

"Yes, young lady, to you we here owe it that we are not at the bottom of those wild waters with our three unfortunate shipmates."

"I did my duty, for the dogs warned me that strangers were near the island, and upon seeing your foolhardy attempt to run this channel I at once set out to save you, for I knew what your fate would be."

"I suppose you wish to return to your yacht?"

"No, we wish to land on your island," said Doctor Rowland.

"That neither my grandfather nor I will allow," was the firm response.

"We are acting as Government officers, young lady, and our duty calls us there," said Doctor Rowland firmly.

"I care not what you are, or what your duties are, you do not go to that island, for it is the home of my grandfather and myself, and we do not allow any visitors there."

"We certainly have the power to go there if we wish."

Island Nell suddenly put her helm down and her skiff darted back toward the foaming caldron of waters, while she answered:

"What power have you?"

"None, for I'll wreck you here in an instant if you dare to threaten me."

"For shame, to so treat one who has just saved you from death!"

Doctor Rowland muttered something very like an oath, while Calvin Mabrey spoke up quickly, for he saw that the girl would carry out her threat, and he felt, too, ashamed at the part they were playing against her.

"My dear young lady, it is not our intention to threaten you in the least; but, as Doctor Rowland says, we are here on an official search, and I wish to ask you to allow us to land upon your island, and I ask it in the name of the Government."

"What is your purpose in going there?"

"To search the island."

"Do you suspect us of being smugglers?" asked Nell, with a sneer, keeping her boat off and very near the wild waters as they flowed among the rocks.

"Oh, no!"

"Why, then, do you wish to land?"

"Will you frankly tell me the truth if I ask you a question?" asked Lieutenant Mabrey.

"I will."

"Who are on the island?"

"My grandfather now, as I am here."

"No one else?"

"No."

"You are sure?"

"I am, unless you wish me to include all of our household."

"I do."

"Well, there are two dogs, five cats, six birds and a parrot, besides grandpa and myself."

"You have no guest at present?"

"No."

"You are certain about this?"

"Why should I not be?"

"Well, we are anxious to find one who has escaped the clutches of the law, and we thought we might find him here."

"You thought wrong, sir, for we live an honest life, and are not criminals ourselves, nor do we give shelter to those who are."

"I thank you, my sweet girl, and I believe you."

"Now, please, return us on board our yacht."

"Will you give it up, Mabrey?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, for as this young lady does not wish us to land, and has done us such noble service to-night, I will not do so."

"This is no time for sentiment, Mabrey."

"We owe our lives to the girl, that is true, and I am willing to cancel the debt with gold; but I believe, in spite of her denial, that Nick Burton is concealed on the island," said Doctor Rowland warmly.

"Nick Burton did you say?" quickly asked Island Nell.

"Yes, that is the name I uttered."

"Why should he seek concealment here?"

"Because he is a fugitive from justice, as you doubtless know."

"I do not know any such thing, and I would have you tell me what he has done, that he is hunted for by you?"

"He assassinated a superior officer."

"An assassin is one who strikes a death-blow at another, without danger to himself, is it not?" quickly asked Nell.

"Yes."

"Well, the man who says that Nick Burton is an assassin utters a downright falsehood, for he never did a mean act in his life," was the hot reply of the young girl.

"What, another believes in his innocence?" muttered Doctor Rowland, while Calvin Mabrey added:

"And a woman too."

Aloud to Nell he said:

"Well, young lady, Midshipman Burton killed his superior officer, shooting him down in a fit of madness, and then fled to save himself from the punishment he knew would follow."

"He escaped?" asked Nell quickly.

"Yes."

"I am glad of that," she frankly said.

"It is our duty to capture him, and suspecting that he might be in hiding here, for you are known to be his friend, we came here to look for him."

"Well, he is not on the island, and, if he was I would not let you take him, for I suppose you would send him to prison."

"More than that, young lady."

"Ah! you would kill him?"

"Death is the penalty of his crime."

"Well, I shall try and find him and warn him of his fate, and that you are searching for him."

"Now where do you wish me to take you, for my grandfather will be anxious about me."

"You will not let us land?"

"I will not."

"Then kindly take us back to our yacht."

"Where is she?"

"Anchored yonder, outside the reef a cable's length."

"There is no yacht there."

The whole party gazed in amazement, to discover that the girl's words were true.

The *Ruth* had mysteriously disappeared.

What it meant none knew.

But certain it was that she was not in sight.

"What does this mean?" said Calvin Mabrey angrily.

"It means that your craft has gone adrift," answered Nell quietly.

"But there was a man left on board."

"Then he has run off with her, for in this breeze she could not capsize."

"What man was it left in charge?" asked the doctor.

"The new man, sir," answered a seaman.

"By Jove, doctor, it was that man you sent to me."

"Jack Downes?"

"Yes, that was his name."

"I know a man by the name of Jack Downes, and if he is the one I know, he is a villain," said Nell.

"Well, he has run off with the yacht, and we are left in the lurch, young lady, so we will have to claim your hospitality," said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"I cannot offer it, sir: but I will lend you a cat-rig boat to carry you back to port."

"Thank you, we will have to accept your offer; but will you not act as our pilot?" asked Doctor Rowland.

"No, sir, for the one who piloted you here must know the way back."

"I will land you on yonder rock, and go after the cat-rig and come and take you off."

"Surely you will let us at least go ashore to take the boat?" urged the doctor.

"I will not!"

"Here is the rock, so wait for my return here," and the skiff glided alongside of a large rock, and the shipwrecked party had nothing to do but to get out upon the little isle, while Nell at once headed in toward the little basin which served as her island harbor, leaving the men greatly chagrined at her determined rebuff of their every effort to land.

CHAPTER XXI.

ISLAND NELL'S VICTORY.

WHEN Island Nell departed upon her return to the island after the cat-rigged boat, Doctor Rowland at once urged that she should be seized and held as a hostage until daylight, when her grandfather, to gain her release, he felt confident would allow them to visit the island.

But this Lieutenant Mabrey would not hear to for an instant.

"No, doctor," he said, "the girl saved our

lives, and in return I must take her word that Burton is not on the island; besides, I think that she showed real innocence when told what Burton had been guilty of."

"She was acting her part," growled the doctor.

"Well, I believe her, and think we shall have to look elsewhere for the fugitive."

"Do you think she will return at all, or was it not to get rid of us she pretended she would go after the boat?"

"Oh, she will be back," confidently said Mabrey.

"If she does not we will be in a bad way, for the tide is out now, and we are but a foot above the water, and with it rushing in and seas breaking over this rock, as they will with the wind rising as it is, we will be washed off."

"You are right, doctor; but I have faith in the girl— Oh! there she comes now."

The boat was now visible, coming out of the basin.

Her single sail carried her swiftly along, and watching her course, she was seen to be following the windings of the channel.

"The skiff is in tow, sir," said a seaman.

"Yes, it is for her to go back in; but what do you say, doctor, to remaining near the island until daylight and then see if we can discover your yacht?"

"I am willing, for I have not given up hope that we may yet make a landing on the island, and I feel confident that that fellow is concealed there."

After a few moments longer of waiting, the sailboat glided gently alongside of the rock.

"Here is your boat, sir; she is twenty-five feet long, ten in beam, has good depth and is a good sea boat and will carry you in safety."

"Please leave her in care of Beamis, the boatman, and I will get her when next I come to the town."

"You certainly will allow me to recompense you in some way for all that you have done?" said Calvin Mabrey.

"No, sir, I do not do my duty for gold."

"Get into your boat and follow me out, for this is a place where you need a pilot."

As Nell spoke she sprung into her skiff and cast off, the others quickly following her example.

Taking the lead she piloted the large sailboat out through the break in the reef, and as soon as it was clear, she put her little craft about and darted back again, calling out:

"Good-night."

"That is a remarkably strange girl, doctor," said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Yes, and a willful madcap, who will some day get into trouble, for I verily believe that her island is nothing more than a smugglers' resort, and that her old grandfather is their chief."

"I have never heard this against them."

"Nor I, and yet they have no visible means of subsistence, and they live, it is said, in the best manner, considering their isolation."

"The girl comes up to town and buys large quantities of stores at a time, and pays cash for them, and yet she never sells anything."

"I tell you, Mabrey, there is something wrong then, for her old grandfather had the lighthouse, at a good salary, and yet would not keep it, for then they had to be under an official eye."

"My plan would be to land on that island at all hazards, search it thoroughly, for Nick Burton, and smugglers' booty as well, and satisfy myself that I was right or wrong."

"If wrong, you can simply say that you had to do your duty; if right, then no apology is necessary."

With such arguments the doctor at last got Lieutenant Mabrey to yield a reluctant consent that he would remain near the island until day dawned, and then attempt a landing."

"But how are we to reach the island, doctor?"

"I watched the girl run the channel in her skiff, run out in this craft and on her return again, and I believe, with light sail in daylight, we can make it, for it is not so formidable a guntlet to pass through as she made believe, when we have a boat that minds her helm like this one."

"Well, doctor, we can but try it; but now let us run to some place for shelter until morning, and get what rest we can, and dry our clothes."

The doctor headed for a little island a mile distant, upon which he knew a landing could be made, and having accomplished it without much difficulty, the party were soon gathered around a blazing fire, for materials to light it with had been found in the locker of the boat.

After their clothes were dried the party sought rest for the couple of hours yet until dawn, and then, to their delight found that Nell had not been forgetful of their appetites, for she had put on a liberal supply of edibles.

Having partaken of a hearty breakfast, they went on board the boat and set sail once more for Hermit's Isle.

They heard the cries of Poll, announcing their presence near the island, but saw no human being in sight.

Rounding the point, Doctor Rowland took his stand in the bow, to direct the lieutenant how to steer, and the sail being reefed to the second row of nettles, to decrease the speed, the boat was headed slowly for the break in the reef wall.

As they neared it, suddenly a clear voice shouted from the pine thicket, which was too dense to penetrate:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ay, ay!" answered Doctor Rowland.

"Put that boat about and stand away from this island!" came the ringing order.

"We intend to land, my girl, and search that island," answered Doctor Rowland.

"I warn you to keep off!" shouted Island Nell.

"And we heed not your warning," returned Doctor Rowland.

Hardly had the words left his lips when from the pine thicket came a puff of white smoke, mingled with red flame, followed by the deep roar of the howitzer and the shrieking of a solid shot directly over the sailboat.

Doctor Rowland dropped down into the boat as though he had been shot, the seamen ducked down upon the flooring, and Calvin Mabrey put the craft about with startling alacrity, so sudden and unexpected was this dangerous and iron-mouthed command hurled at them from the Hermit's Isle.

"I tell you, doctor, we dare not attempt to board that girl in her den, for she will protect herself," said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"No, not until you have a large force, that is certain; so let us take a search for my yacht, and then return to the town."

This advice was followed; and Island Nell, as she stood by her howitzer ready to fire again if they persisted in landing, saw the sailboat depart, cruising slowly about for awhile, and then shaking out her reefs, head for port.

Nell, with a smile of triumph in her eyes, then walked up to the cabin with her grandfather, who was also quite elated at their victory, and while the old man took his customary seat before the door, she went on to the bluff to watch the sailboat.

Far off she saw it, and as she looked, suddenly out from behind an island, where it had evidently been in hiding, shot a small schooner, her decks crowded with men, and her course evidently in hot chase of the little craft which now was trying hard to escape from the foe that had come so unexpectedly upon her.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CHASE.

It was certainly a deep humiliation to Doctor Rowland to be so thoroughly beaten off from his purpose by a mere girl.

And to that girl he most certainly owed his life, and under the circumstances he knew that Lieutenant Mabrey would not tolerate any abuse of her, and was anxious to drop the affair.

He hinted that she had fired upon Government sailors in the discharge of their duty, and in response Calvin Mabrey had said:

"She knew us not to be such, and living with an old man, her only protector, she was defending herself."

"No, doctor, I am convinced that Nick Burton is not on that island, and more, I am assured that Island Nell will defend her home from intrusion with her life, and I certainly shall not place any of my men in her way to have her kill them, and thereby get herself into serious trouble."

"You will not follow this up, then?"

"I will not, doctor," was the firm reply.

Nothing more was said upon the subject, but Doctor Rowland looked as though he had not dropped the affair, and meant, in his own way to push the matter.

Suddenly, as they sailed along, working their way through a group of small islands, they saw the bowsprit, bows, and then the full hull of a schooner shoot into view.

"That is the craft known as the Smuggler of Casco, sir," cried an old seaman, who had been in the revenue service of the Maine coast for a long time.

"Say you so, Dennis? Then we must get out of his way, for since Captain Dean of the Breeze, captured and hanged some of their fellows some months ago, they have threatened retaliation upon all naval officers and seamen they can catch," cried Lieutenant Mabrey.

The breeze was fresh, and, under consideration of not being thoroughly familiar with those waters, they were running under a single reef.

In a twinkling this was shaken out, the crew got to windward and trimmed boat, to give her every chance to do her best, and the little craft proved herself a swift sailer, for she went flying along at a merry pace.

The schooner was one of a class then far more common than now, and which can be described as of the same style of build as the trim-looking, fast-sailing, saucy-looking, staunch sea-going craft now known as the New York Pilot Boats.

She had evidently sighted the cat-rig before those on board saw her, and came out from her lurking place in full chase.

Her topmasts were exceedingly tall, her masts

being hardly over the usual length of vessels of her tonnage, and her upper hamper could be easily housed, so that she could lay concealed behind almost any of the islands.

Between her masts there was a large space, which gave to her foresail a great breadth, that more than made up for any loss in height.

Her main boom and gaff were also exceedingly long, giving a vast surface of canvas in the mainsail, and so also were her topsails and jibs large, for the bowsprit, capable of being quickly housed, ran nearly as much as half the hull's length out over the bows.

The topmasts of the schooner were going up, as she shot out into view of those upon the sailboat, and, until this extra canvas began to draw, the little cat-rig was not gained on so rapidly.

But once the schooner settled down to her work, she began to pick up the little boat rapidly, and Lieutenant Mabrey said, pointing to a group of islands a mile distant:

"Have you ever been among those islands, doctor?"

"Yes, I camped on the largest one for a week once, when out hunting."

"Then you know the chances among them?"

"Pretty well."

"The best thing we can do is to get to them for shelter, for if we hold on the schooner will overhaul us within the league."

"There is no doubt about that; but how can we escape her by going to the islands?"

"We may, perhaps, give her the slip, and can certainly run out of some channel, which she does not expect us to take and thus gain a mile or so, perhaps a league on her, and that would enable us to reach the mainland and escape, though we would have to desert our own boat."

"You are right, Mabrey, so I'll take the helm and we'll head for the islands," was the doctor's response, and the sailboat was at once put away upon the wind and went driving along, with a large white bone in her teeth, straight for the island group.

But, hardly had she changed her course before the schooner did likewise, and wing and wing came rushing on in the wake of her prey.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SMUGGLER OF CASCO BAY.

THE group of islands, to which the sailboat was heading, with Doctor Rowland at the helm, consisted of a number of cedar-clad rocks, some of them an acre or more in size.

Channels ran among them, and, occupying, as they did, fully a mile square of space, it was possible, as Lieutenant Mabrey had said, to give the smugglers the slip by running among them for shelter.

If there had been any doubt in regard to the character of the craft in pursuit, when she first was seen, that doubt was soon removed by her flying at her peak the flag under which she sailed.

It was not a flag that was seen, either in the "Print of Flags of all Nations" which was black, and in the center were a pair of white hands, clasped, and about the wrist of each, and connected with a chain, were red handcuffs or manacles.

This was the well-known device of the Smuggler of Casco Bay, and, where the field of his flag had been blue, before the capture and execution of a boat's crew of his men, he had boldly discarded the blue for the black, in token that he should neither ask or give quarter.

The men looked decidedly gloomy, when their eyes fell upon the flag of the smuggler, while the faces of Lieutenant Mabrey and Doctor Rowland also blanched a little, though they remained very calm.

As the boat dashed into the channel between the first of the islands, the schooner was about a mile astern, and coming on like a race-horse.

Upon her deck were visible fully a score and a half of men, and forward, peeping over her bows, could be seen an eighteen-pounder.

All in the flying boat thought that they would be fired upon by the schooner, before they reached the shelter of the islands; but this was not the case, for from reasons they did not understand, the smugglers did not send a shot after them.

Sweeping in the islands out of sight, Doctor Rowland said:

"Lieutenant, my idea would be to seek a hiding-place right here, for the smugglers will naturally suppose we have gone on to the other side of the islands, and will push on after us, when we can slip out astern of her, and thus get a long start before we are discovered."

"The very idea, Doctor; but is there water enough for the schooner through here, as she must have all of eight feet?"

"Yes, on the bars there is fully nine, and through the islands double that."

"So you think they have a pilot?"

"Indeed they have."

"Well, let us run into yonder little passageway and hide ourselves," and the boat's sail was lowered quickly, and seizing the branches of the overhanging trees it was drawn into the narrow pass.

Grounding at one place, the men sprung out

and eased her over, and she was soon upon the other side of the island, the sail was raised, and the crew all ready to push off and take flight, as soon as the schooner had passed on into the island group and gone by their hiding-place.

The schooner was now just entering the island channels, and not two hundred yards away.

But, suddenly she luffed up, the topsails were lowered, and she lay to for a few minutes.

The result was that two life-skiffs, with sails, and a yawl, also with a sail, were lowered into the water and into each got six or seven men.

Next a fourth boat was lowered, and four oarsmen and a coxswain were in this.

All unconscious of what was going on the little party in the sailboat were patiently waiting.

They knew not what a cunning foe they had to deal with in the smuggler chief of Casco Bay.

As soon as his four boats were ready, the chief dispatched them on their way, the two life-skiffs to round the island group, one on either side, searching the shores, the yawl to take one channel the rowboat another, and the schooner began to follow the main pass through.

With five different bands of hunters upon their track, it seemed impossible for those in the cat-rig to escape.

All unconscious of what was going on, for the smugglers had worked noiselessly, the fugitive party were watching over the tree-tops for the schooner's tall topmasts.

Soon they saw them glide by, devoid of canvas and Lieutenant Mabrey said:

"Well, we are safe, so we'll get ready to slip away."

Hardly were the words uttered, when there came in view one of the skiffs from the schooner.

It was gliding along the shores, not very far distant, and its crew were searching every indenture and nook.

They caught sight of the sailboat, at the same moment they were discovered, and a cheer broke from their lips, while their boat was headed directly for the chase.

"Shove off! we must run the gantlet," cried Mabrey, and the cat-rig glided out from the land.

But, sheltered from the wind by being close inshore, she did not gain headway rapidly, while the skiff, further out, and lighter, came rushing swiftly down across her bows.

There were seven men in the skiff, all armed; but those in the cat-rig held the advantage on account of their boat being larger, and the high sides protecting them.

"Get your pistols ready, lads."

"The doctor will sail the boat," cried Lieutenant Mabrey, setting the example by drawing his own weapon, for they had all had the loads drawn out, after their wetting, and fresh ones put in from powder and ball found on the sailboat.

Crouching down, so that only his hand on the tiller was visible, Doctor Rowland guided the craft safely by keeping her sail full, and not by looking ahead, for they expected a volley from their foes.

The rest of the party were also crouching low out of sight, their weapons in hand.

Did the cat-rig get a good puff of wind, there were good chances that she would shoot out across the bows of the skiff, and then it would become a stern chase, with the favor leaning toward the fugitives.

They could not bear to starboard, on account of a reef putting out there, so had to keep a pretty nearly straight course, with the helmsman steering by the "feel" of his tiller, as he dared not look ahead.

Presently the top of the small mast of the skiff came in view, and it was seen that she was gliding along at a lively pace, and heading directly across their bows.

Would she make it to the given point, which both must pass, in time to board the sailboat, or would she drop astern?

It was a question for a minute, which would triumph, and then it resolved itself into a certainty, that both must reach the point at the same instant.

Could the sailboat fall off, she might have shown a clean pair of heels to the skiff, but the reef prevented this, and, as it was, they would shave it dangerously close.

On the little skiff, a quick glance showed Lieutenant Mabrey that the men could not hide.

The wind came from a quarter that laid the skiff over so that she could be seen inside from stern to stern, and her crew were seated upon the weather gunwale, their weapons in their hands.

"They intend to board us," muttered Lieutenant Mabrey, and then he added:

"Lads, we must check them."

"I will take the helmsman, you aim at the crew!"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the men cheerily, and a moment after came the words:

"Are you ready?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Fire!"

The weapons flashed together, almost as one, excepting the pistol of Lieutenant Mabrey.

The powder in his weapon flashed in the pan, and his men fired wildly, for but one of the crew of the skiff fell, and he went over backward into the sea and sunk from sight.

The next instant the skiff luffed sharp, and though Doctor Rowland tried to avoid the shock, the two boats came together with a crash that stove in the sides of the little craft, and she immediately began to fill.

"Spring aboard, lads, and take this craft for ours is gone down," shouted the leader of the smuggler crew.

With a yell they sprung upon the deck of the sailboat, and instantly a fierce, hand-to-hand fight was begun.

"Hurl them overboard, lads! cut them to pieces, and we can yet escape," shouted Lieutenant Mabrey, cutting down a smuggler as he spoke, while Doctor Rowland shot another at the same instant.

Overboard then was thrown a third foe, but he dragged two seamen of the sailboat with him, and a third was shot down, so that really no advantage had been gained.

But Lieutenant Mabrey made a rush into the midst of his foes, and Doctor Rowland and the seamen were at his back, and savage was the hand-to-hand conflict.

But only for an instant did it last, for a sound like that made by many wings was heard, followed by a shock and a cheer, and the yawl from the smuggler schooner had run alongside the sailboat and her crew had come to the aid of their comrades.

A cry of quarter from the remaining seamen, and Lieutenant Mabrey said in sad tones:

"I yield the craft."

"To whom do I surrender?"

"To the Smuggler of Casco Bay, Sir Lieutenant," was the stern response of that worthy, who had come to the rescue in the yawl, which he had taken command of upon leaving the schooner.

Then turning to his men he added:

"Put the shackles upon these prisoners, lads, until we decide what shall be their fate."

This order was promptly obeyed, and Calvin Mabrey, Doctor Rowland and the two remaining seamen found themselves in irons, and in the power of a foe as merciless as a pirate.

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN LEAGUE WITH OUTLAWS.

It was with painful uncertainty, that Lieutenant Mabrey and Doctor Rowland contemplated their situation.

The doctor felt that he had been the cause of getting them all into the trouble through his over-zealous desire to capture Nick Burton.

The lieutenant had coincided with him, it was true, in searching for the fugitive at the Hermit's Isle; but it had proven a most disastrous expedition.

The yacht Ruth had been run off with, the runaway and thief being Jack Downes whom the doctor had recommended as a seaman; their boat had been dashed to pieces on the rocks, and some of their number had lost their lives; their lives had been saved by the very girl whose domain they had intended to invade; they had been driven off by her, and, forced to fly from foes, they had come to grief, lost more of their party and what was worse than all had become prisoners to desperate men.

Having captured the party, the smugglers fired a swivel gun, mounted in the bow of the yawl as a signal to the schooner and other boats.

But these had already heard the sound of combat and making all haste to the scene soon arrived.

Upon being taken on board the schooner, it was found that she carried an eighteen-pounder forward, another on the stern, and two amidships, all mounted on pivots, which gave her a broadside of four large pieces and made her a very formidable adversary for her size.

Her crew were dressed in white pants, blue shirts and wore red woolen skull-caps, which gave them a very picturesque appearance.

There were, all told some forty men, and Lieutenant Mabrey, as he stood, heavily ironed, by the side of Doctor Rowland, muttered:

"This craft must also be a pirate, for she would not carry this force as a smuggler."

"She is doubtless a pirate, as are most of the smugglers of this coast; but what will be done with us?"

"I have an idea that we will have to dance a jig in mid-air, while you will be ransomed, as I shall take care to tell them that you are the richest man in Portland, for you must not die, as it would kill your daughter," said the generous lieutenant.

"The villains must ransom you also, Mabrey."

"Ah, doctor, I am a poor lieutenant, with little over my pay, and cannot afford to buy myself at their figure, for they will consider me very valuable," said the lieutenant sadly.

"I will pay your ransom, Mabrey, as I got you into the scrape."

"You are very kind, Doctor Rowland, but then there are my men."

"Let them take the consequences," was the

cruel reply, and seeing the look of surprise upon the young officer's face, at his words, Doctor Rowland hastened to add:

"If they enlist, they will be spared, and then they can desert and return to you, bringing perhaps valuable information."

"No, doctor, I would rather die bravely with my men, than cowardly leave them to their fate."

"As you are so determined, I will offer to pay their ransom too."

"It is certainly most kind of you, Doctor Rowland, and we will do all in our power to repay you for all that they may ask as a ransom."

"Is that the chief?" asked Doctor Rowland, as though anxious to turn the subject.

He pointed to a man of compact form, dressed in a uniform such as the men wore, only that he had gold lace down the outer seams of his pants, and wore a red silk sash about his waist and his skull-cap was embroidered with a miniature flag upon the front, and had a tassel of gold thread.

His face was clean shaven and a strong one, and his hair was snow-white though he seemed prematurely gray, as he did not appear to be a man who had reached fifty years.

"Yes, that is the smuggler captain, I guess, as I have had him described to me, and I shall demand at once our release," said Lieutenant Mabrey, and, raising his voice he called out:

"Ho, Sir Smuggler, your attention please."

"I will attend to you, sir, all too soon for your own comfort, after I have gotten my vessel under way," was the threatening response, and the smuggler chief ordered his boats hauled up, the cat-rig was taken in tow, and the schooner moved gracefully away upon her course, just as a small smack was seen coming down the bay toward her, but yet a league distant.

"Now, sir, what is your will?" and the smuggler chief walked up to his prisoners, who were in irons, standing in a group aft.

"I demand to know why an American officer, in the discharge of his duty has been thus treated, even by an outlaw?"

"My dear sir, I know no difference as to American or other officers, in my career, which, as you doubtless know is a lawless one."

"I received word that you were coming down the bay, and I looked out for you and have captured you," answered the smuggler.

"And now that you have made us prisoners, what is your intention regarding us?"

"To hang you," was the cool reply.

"You dare not, outlaw though you are, do such an outrage as this," hotly said Lieutenant Mabrey.

"Dare I not? Well, you shall see, for my men have sworn retaliation against those who wear your uniform, for our comrades, captured a while ago, and ruthlessly put to death."

"As outlaws they deserved death."

"Well, as those who executed them you shall die."

"Not one of us here was on the Breeze at the time of their execution."

"It matters not; you wear the same uniform as those who did the deed, and you shall suffer death, so prepare, for in one hour you are to die."

"If such is your decision with my men and I, at least spare this gentleman, who is not in the service," said Lieutenant Mabrey, referring to Doctor Rowland.

"No, sir, I shall spare no one."

"He is a man of wealth and able to pay a good ransom for his life," urged the lieutenant.

"No, I will take no ransom," was the decided rejoinder.

"I will pay a most liberal ransom for each and all of us," said Doctor Rowland.

"I have said that I will accept no ransom."

"Your lives are to be the forfeit in retaliation for our murdered messmates."

Calvin Mabrey glanced at Doctor Rowland at this, who said:

"I will give you your price, Sir Smuggler, so you have but to name it."

"My price is your lives— Ho, Morris, is not that little craft signaling?" and he called out to one who appeared to act as a lieutenant or mate.

"She is flying our flag, sir, at her peak," answered Morris, who had a glass at his eye.

"Then it is our new captain, who sent word that he would come off to us to-day or to-night," and turning to his prisoners, he continued:

"Now, gentlemen, your fate is no longer in my hands."

"What do you mean?" asked Calvin Mabrey.

"Simply that our captain will quickly decide what is to be done with you."

"Are you not the captain?"

"I have been acting as such on board ship; but our chief is a silent partner ashore, as it were, or has been; but now, having gotten into some difficulty that forces him to throw off his mask, he will take command himself, and hence I have nothing more to say regarding you, though, from what I know of the position in which he is at present placed, I think he will be even less merciful than I and have you hanged,

where it was my intention to have you shot as brave men."

The eyes of all were now turned upon the coming smack, at whose peak was flying a small flag like the one on the schooner.

There were but half a dozen men visible on board, but these were so hidden by the sail as not to be distinctly seen.

"Mr. Morris, muster the men to receive their chief, and lay the schooner to," ordered the smuggler.

Promptly the orders were obeyed, and, as the schooner lay to, the smack gently glided up under the stern, and a tall form leaped over the taffrail upon the smuggler's deck.

"My God! the Smuggler Captain is Nick Burton!" broke in tones of horror from the lips of Lieutenant Mabrey, as his eyes fell upon the one who had thus boarded the schooner, and who wore the uniform of the smugglers.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT HIS MERCY.

It was certainly a startling surprise, not only to Lieutenant Mabrey but also to Doctor Rowland and the seamen, to recognize in the young man who had come on board the smuggler schooner as the "new captain" none other than Nick Burton.

Immediately upon his arrival on board he had glanced over the vessel, then at the crew, and lastly his eyes had fallen upon the prisoners.

He had appeared to start as his eyes fell upon them, and then, wheeling quickly upon his heel he descended into the cabin, the white-haired officer following him.

Those of his men who had come with him also boarded the schooner, the little smack being left with two seamen on board.

"My Heavens! there is now no longer doubt regarding poor Burton."

"He has leagued himself with smugglers," said Lieutenant Mabrey, addressing Doctor Rowland, after Nick Burton had gone down into the cabin.

"Smuggler in name, pirate in act."

"Yes, there is no doubt now," said Doctor Rowland.

In the mean time the subject of their conversation had gone down into the cabin and thrown himself into an easy-chair, the white-haired smuggler doing likewise.

"Well, sir, I am glad to meet you, if you are Captain Paul," said the youth, fixing his dark eyes upon the old smuggler.

"I am called Captain Paul now, sir, as I have been in charge so long; but you know I am but a lieutenant under Captain Burke, as you know."

"Yes, and he told me that I would find you a splendid fellow."

"I thank him, sir."

"You received the letters I sent you through a messenger?"

"Yes, sir, as my being here to receive you proves, and I am under your orders, sir."

"You are still to retain command, for I may be called ashore at any time; but I notice that you have prisoners on board?"

"Yes, sir," and Captain Paul went on to tell how he had captured them, he having received word from a spy in port that a naval officer and some men, in a small yacht, were bound down the bay upon some mission, and could be captured."

"And their mission?" asked the youth.

"I supposed you were aware that it was to capture a certain naval officer who has gotten himself into trouble," said Captain Paul, with a smile.

"Yes, I know," was the significant response, and a strange look came over the face of the young sailor.

Then he asked:

"But why did you make them prisoners?"

"To retaliate on them the acts of naval officers against my men, sir," was the almost fierce reply.

"How so?"

"A boat's crew from this schooner were captured and cruelly put to death, and I have sworn that a like number of American officers and men shall perish."

"Well, Captain Paul, you will have to look elsewhere for material to retaliate upon, for those prisoners must be released."

"Do you mean it, Captain Burton?" asked the old smuggler in surprise.

"I have a way, Captain Paul, of meaning just what I say, as you will find out when you know me better."

"Those prisoners must be at once released, allowed to go on board their boat and depart."

"But, as we spare their lives, we can at least get a large ransom for them, which they are willing to pay?"

"Not a penny, sir; they must go free, and, as it is, you have brought the war-vessels upon us more furiously than before."

"It couldn't be worse, Captain Burton, with our men captured as they are and hanged without trial."

"Well, captain, as law-breakers we must face those risks."

"Now go on deck and release those prisoners,

with my compliments, and then return here, and we will lay our plans for the future."

The old smuggler seemed not to relish the task before him; but there was something in the face of his young captain that showed him not to be a man to parley a trifle with, and so he ascended to the deck and approached the prisoners, who were most anxiously awaiting the result of the coming on board of the man they had been in search of, and who they now found out had leagued himself with outlaws.

The schooner still lay to, the cat-rig astern, and the smack upon one side.

The crew stood about the deck, conversing in low, earnest tones, and with anxious glances at the prisoners, who, in their turn, felt that they had little hope of gaining their release.

Their eyes fell upon Captain Paul, as he came out of the cabin, and they watched his face eagerly.

Then they expected to see Nick Burton follow him, but were disappointed.

Glancing over the schooner, then out upon the waters, they saw that Captain Paul wore a troubled look.

Something had evidently gone wrong with him.

Approaching them slowly, he said:

"Well, gentlemen, our new captain reverses my decision."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked Lieutenant Mabrey.

"I mean that he says you are not to be the victims of retaliation."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, he orders me to set you free."

"All of us?" asked Calvin Mabrey.

"Yes, boat and all."

"He is generous," said Doctor Rowland, with a sneer.

"He is so generous that he refuses that I demand a ransom of you even."

"He expects to make capital for himself when we get him into the law's clutches," said Doctor Rowland.

"Oh! no, for you are not going to get him."

"Is this the first coming on board of your commander?"

"Yes, he has just come on board, and my idea of him is that he will be a splendid officer."

"Yet you have to yield your position to a boy."

"That is nothing, for I have never looked upon myself as commander, and the laws of our league make me obey without a murmur, which I would do, even if the chief sent a woman out to command the schooner."

"Then there is a chief of still higher rank than this young captain?"

"Certainly. We have a chief whom we call the admiral."

"Where is he?"

"Here, there, everywhere; but let me release you of your irons and put you aboard your boat, before Captain Burton comes on deck and shows his teeth."

This conversation had been carried on between the smuggler and Doctor Rowland, but Lieutenant Mabrey had been an attentive listener to all that had been said. Now, as the irons were knocked off of his hands and feet, he said:

"Present to your captain my thanks for his act toward us, and say to him, that though he has seen fit to become an outlaw, if the time ever comes when I can reciprocate his deed of to-day, I shall gladly do so, for I feel that our lives were fully at his mercy, and he has shown himself humane toward those who would have been merciless to him."

"You talk like a true man, sir, and I'll not forget you, should you again get into my grip."

"I will tell Captain Burton just what you say, and I feel as you do, that his mercy alone has saved you from hanging."

"Now, gentlemen, you are free, and here is your boat to depart in."

They delayed not in going on board the cat-rig, and a few minutes after were sailing briskly toward Portland, while the schooner, with the smack in her wake, was heading seaward.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BRONX AND SPORT FORM A MYSTERIOUS COMPACT.

SEVERAL days after the shipwreck of the trim little craft, which had crossed the ocean, with Bronx and Sport the guiding spirits, those two worthies were seated in a large and comfortable room of a tavern of the lower order, situated within a stone's throw of the water.

The outside of the tavern was by no means prepossessing, for it was one of the "old time" mansions of the town, built by the first settlers.

It looked like the abode of ghosts and rats.

But within there was a good deal of solid comfort.

There was a neat-looking tap-room, where sailors were wont to congregate and drink their grog, and adjoining was an eating-room, with snowy linen cloths and a look of cleanliness that was tempting to the hungry man.

The barmaid, Beauty, was deserving of her name, and the host, Mynherr Stoll, and Frau Stoll, his better half, looked like a couple who

loved good cheer, and were wont to give their guests the best the markets afforded.

A stairway led from the hall to rooms above, and two adjoining, in one wing overlooking the harbor, were the quarters where Bronx and Sport had domiciled themselves, the former having been known to Mynherr Stoll on his former visits to Portland.

The rooms were the best in the Stoll Tavern, for Bronx had told mine host to give them the best the house afforded.

A door made them communicate, and a small table was set for dinner, for the two mariners never went down-stairs to their meals.

"Well, lad," said Bronx, "that was a bold thing for you to do, to take a craft and go alone down this coast, after the experience you had had of it."

"Oh, I am a pretty good sailor, as you know, and thought I could feel my way along, and try and find the wreck."

"And you found it?"

"What was left of it?"

"But not the box?"

"No."

"Too bad, for I was especially commissioned about that box, as you remember in reading over my instructions."

"Yes, I remember that it was marked as very urgent that you should get it."

"And after finding its burying-place as we did, on that island, digging it up and getting it safe into the secret locker of the schooner, to lose it was too bad."

"Well, I'll have to tell the chief it was lost the night of the wreck."

"Well, so it was."

"True; but what is this you tell me about the girl who saved us?"

"Oh, yes, she was viewing the wreck when I arrived, and two wreckers had her in a tight place, for they were going to kill her, when I happened on the scene and shot them."

"No! then you repaid her service to us?"

"Well, in part only, for I fear I can never repay her for my life."

"You are soft on that girl, Sport."

"I confess to being most deeply interested in her."

"Well, it's a bad thing to fall in love, for a man always makes a fool of himself under such circumstances."

"Well, I suppose I will not be an exception; but I never cared for the society of the fair sex, and when I now meet a girl, a wild little hermitess as she is, I feel that I was really over head and ears in love with her," said Sport earnestly.

"Perhaps she got the box?"

"No."

"How do you know that she did not?"

"She said so."

"You asked her?"

"Yes."

"And you believe her?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"Well, you are heart-sick; but I would not believe her."

"I would, for that girl would not tell a lie."

"Anyhow, the box is gone."

"It looks so, Bronx."

"So we must make up for its loss by doing the rest of the work set out for us in the best shape."

"I think there will be no trouble about that; but, Bronx, did you notice that the tin box was buried in a grave with a lady?"

"Yes, so the chief said."

"One of his victims, I guess?"

"Yes, it was one he wanted to get rid of, and I buried her."

"You?"

"Yes, he sent me to do that little work."

"And you say it was a woman?"

"It was."

"And the chief killed her?"

"Say, Sport, I don't remember all that occurred then, for I make it my business to forget things that should be forgotten."

"The woman was killed, by some one that is certain, and I was sent on shore to bury her."

"Afterward the chief buried a tin box in her grave, and there we found it, as you know."

"Now let us drop the past and talk about the future."

"I am willing, so tell me first what is to be done now that we are upon the field of action."

"We have got that to do which is a complicated thing to carry out, and maybe there will be some blood-letting to be done too."

"I am not afraid to shed blood, or to lose it, in a square game of life and death."

"I believe that of you; but what you have to do you will be well paid for, and it needs delicate handling."

"I am aware of that, from what I know of the plot; but I don't wish any stab-in-the-back business, for I am no assassin."

"You surely will not hesitate to kill when it becomes necessary?"

"I'll not become an assassin for any man, or his money."

"I'll play my part well, Bronx; but if you wish any underhand knife work get some one else to do it or do it yourself."

"I suppose I will have to, if you refuse."

"I do refuse to draw a weapon, except in self-defense, or kill when it is absolutely necessary, as in the case of those wreckers, who attacked that poor girl.

"Killing those fellows does not weigh one ounce of remorse upon my conscience; but to kill a man otherwise, be he the veriest wretch, would weight me down with a load of shame and sorrow."

"You are a strange fellow, Sport."

"I was born that way, Broux, old fellow," was the smiling reply.

"Well, I must give you our whole plot, for I might look the world over for another man who would do as well as you will.

"No, you are just the one I need, and you must do the work."

"If it is nothing that is criminal, Bronx, I'm your man, for though I have run to the bad, in a measure, and am a gambler, I am not the wicked wretch that some men believe me to be.

"Now let us read your instructions fully."

Broux took from his pocket a roll of papers and began to read the contents in a low, distinct tone to his young shipmate.

Sport listened attentively, and then said:

"I'll do my part, Bronx, but if you find it necessary to take life, you'll have to be the assassin, and that settles it."

"I am content if you carry out your part."

"Never fear for me," was the response, and just then Beauty, the barmaid entered with a tray full of smoking hot edibles and the mysterious conversation between them came to an end.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RUTH ROWLAND'S TRUST.

In the days that followed the dastard act, that was attributed to her lover in the killing of Duncan Reid, Ruth Rowland seemed a changed being.

She was calm, white-faced and stern, even to Agnes her maid.

She knew just where her father had gone, and for what purpose.

She felt that he hated her lover, for some reason which she could not fathom, and that he would do all in his power to capture Nick Burton and bring him to the gallows.

That he was innocent of the crime with which he was charged, Ruth firmly believed, although the testimony against him was such that no one else doubted his guilt.

In the midst of her sorrows, and during the absence of her father, upon the expedition to Hermit's Isle, which had so nearly proven fatal in more than one instance, an old schoolmate friend arrived.

It was Vivian Moreland, a blonde beauty and heiress, and one who had been Ruth's roommate at the boarding-school in Boston which both had attended for several years.

Vivian was older than Ruth, yet the two had been fast friends, and she had always passed her vacations in Portland at Rowland Manor.

She had been with Doctor Rowland and Ruth when their lives had been saved by Nick Burton, at the time the three were capsized in the bay.

From that day she too had loved Nick Burton; but seeing that he idolized Ruth, she had hidden her feelings for the young sailor, and let affairs take their course.

She felt that she could not win Nick Burton's love, when it was given to Ruth, and so she contented herself with a friendship for him.

Doctor Rowland had asked her to become his wife, and loving Ruth as she did, and admiring and respecting her handsome father, she had consented, for she never could feel real love for other than Nick Burton, and he was beyond her reach.

She had been with Ruth in the sorrowing times before, when Nick Burton had been on trial for his life, and the two shared each other's perfect confidence.

So it was that Vivian Moreland had left her Boston home and hastened to Ruth in her trouble.

The stage from Boston rolled up while Ruth sat at the window, and when she saw who it was that alighted, she was overcome; and sent Agnes hastily down to have Vivian come upstairs immediately.

"Oh, Vivi," she cried, throwing herself into the arms of Miss Moreland.

"Now they accuse poor Nick of being an assassin."

"I heard of your distress, Ruth, and so came to you at once."

"Now tell me all about it," answered Vivian in her kindly way.

Ruth at once told the story, from the reception of the anonymous letter, to the murder of Duncan Reid and flight of Nick Burton.

"My poor Ruth! this does look bad for Nick, does it not?" said Vivian, her lip quivering with emotion.

"It looks as though they were determined to hang Nick Burton."

"If he is guilty of this crime, Ruth, he deserves death, and you certainly can no longer love him."

"Nor would I, did I deem him an assassin; but he is innocent."

"Then why has he taken flight?"

"That I do not know; but I feel that he has some good reason in having done so."

"I wish I could feel as you do, Ruth; but candidly, as Lieutenant Reid confessed, when dying, who it was that shot him down when they left the tavern together and were known to have had angry words there, added to Nick Burton's flight, I confess I believe that in an instant of ungovernable passion he did what, the instant after, he would have given worlds to undo."

"Ah, Vivian, I see that I am alone in my trust of poor Nick; but remember how circumstantial evidence once before tried, found him guilty, and sentenced him to death."

"That was circumstantial evidence, Ruth; but this is proof, it seems to me, and he has added to it by flying. But what does your father think?"

"That he is guilty, of course, for father had never liked Nick, and never wished me to marry him."

"Father had other views for me, and he is happy at the turn in the tide against Nick Burton, and even now is away in search of him at Hermit's Isle, along with Lieutenant Mabrey and a party of seamen."

"For your sake, I hope they will not find him."

"If they do, I shall aid him to escape, if it takes every dollar I can call my own," was the determined reply.

"And I will help you, Ruth. But is not Hermit's Isle the home of that strange girl, Island Nell?"

"Yes."

"She loved Nick, if I remember aright, and as he loved you and she hid herself in seclusion, it seems strange that he should have gone there."

"I do not believe that he did, only father thought so, and so he got Lieutenant Mabrey to accompany him— Ah! there is a sailboat coming in to land at our dock now," and she took up a spy-glass and turned it upon the object that had met her vision.

"It is a strange boat, Vivian, but there are my father and Lieutenant Mabrey in it."

"What can have happened? for less than half of the party return that sailed in the yacht Ruth, and they come back in a strange boat."

"Ah! the boat lands my father, and then goes on its way out to the schooner Barkaway."

"Agnes!"

"Yes, miss," and the maid entered from an adjoining room.

"Tell my father that Miss Moreland has arrived, and that we will receive him here."

There was no blush upon the face of Vivian Moreland, such as the coming of one she loved might have brought there, and walking calmly forward she greeted Doctor Rowland in a pleasant manner, but without the slightest shyness or embarrassment.

Doctor Rowland had made a hasty toilet, after his arrival, before seeking his daughter's room; but his face was haggard and careworn as he entered, and in his courtly way bent low before Vivian Moreland and pressed his lips to her hand.

Then he affectionately greeted Ruth, whose manner was strangely cold, as she said heartily:

"Well, sir, I notice that you return without your prisoner."

"Who said that we went after any prisoner, Ruth?" hastily asked Doctor Rowland.

"Ah! I am aware of just what you went to accomplish, father; but you came back in a strange boat and with but half of your party."

"Yes, and we are lucky to get back at all, for not only were we dashed upon a reef, and barely saved from drowning, but we lost the Ruth, were fired upon by that Hermit tigress, and then captured by a pirate, who intended putting us to death, in retaliation for Captain Dean's having hanged some of his men, when we were saved by the arrival of the young outlaw captain."

"Indeed! you have been in great peril, father, and thank Heaven you have returned in safety; but it was lucky that the young pirate had a heart, or you would have been sacrificed."

"And who do you think the young pirate was, my child?"

"I am sure I do not know, sir, as my acquaintance with pirates is somewhat limited," coldly said Ruth.

"Well, it was a young man, who, holding a Government position, was secretly in league with outlaws, and, driven by his own act to fly for his life, he went to the deck of a pirate craft for safety, where he now is as an outlaw captain."

The voice and manner of Doctor Rowland were so significant, that Ruth could not but understand his meaning, and answered, in a constrained voice:

"You would have me believe that you refer to Nick Burton?"

"He is just the one to whom I do refer, my poor Ruth."

"Do you say, father, that you recognized in Nick Burton the captain of a pirate craft?"

"I do."

"And Lieutenant Mabrey saw him too?"

"He did."

"And his men?"

"Yes, all of us saw him face to face."

"Did you speak to him?"

"No."

"Held no conversation with him?"

"None; he boarded the schooner on which we were prisoners, and was received as the captain of the craft."

"Then he went into the cabin, and soon after his lieutenant came on deck and said that he had orders from Captain Burton to release us."

"We were then set free, and returned to port."

"Father, I do not believe that you would tell me a deliberate falsehood; but even though Lieutenant Mabrey and his men tell me the same as you do, and I will question them, I shall consider that you are mistaken, that the one you saw was not Nick Burton," and with this Ruth walked slowly to the window and glanced out upon the moonlit harbor spread out before her, while her father, dismayed by her perfect trust in the man she so dearly loved, looked at Vivian Moreland as if to see what she thought of Ruth's conduct.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE INDIAN PIRATE.

THE death of Lieutenant Duncan Reid at the hands of Nick Burton, proved more than a nine-days' talk in the town.

There were no doubters as to Nick having killed his rival, but there were a number who believed that it had not happened just as had been related, in spite of the dying statement of the slain man.

Some boldly asserted that it had been a duel without seconds between the two, and then, realizing the position he had placed himself in, Nick Burton had hastily taken flight.

Whither he had gone none knew.

They were aware that no man was better acquainted with the coast, than was the young fugitive, and he could readily find a hiding-place.

A few asserted that he would again join the vessel of Keno the Kennebec, and perhaps turn pirate, as he knew it would be certain death anyway, if he were taken.

As though to give color to this report, several vessels came into port, and their skippers made statement that the Indian chief had once more hoisted the black flag, for several vessels had been boldly overhauled upon the high seas by his swift-sailing schooner.

Nor were these false statements, for having held the conversation with Nick Burton, which the reader will remember, Keno the Kennebec returned to his canoe in a gloomy mood.

His vessel was anchored in the bay, and paddling swiftly to it, he sprung on board and said sternly:

"Let my warriors spread the white wings, for we must fly from here."

"Has anything gone wrong with our chief?" asked Sea Serpent, a tawny Indian brave who acted as second in command.

"Yes, Keno's heart burns with grief for his child, the Wild Bird."

"Did she lie dead among our people, my heart would be at rest, but the Great Spirit has told me in a dream that my Wild Bird lives, and that the pale-faces are keeping her from me."

"We have sought her far on land, we have boarded many white winged sea canoes, but find her not, and my heart is thirsty for revenge."

"Will the chief seek revenge?" asked Sea Serpent.

"Yes."

"When?"

"As soon as the iron guns are on our decks."

"I have been to my friend, the young pale-face Sea Chief, and asked him to go with us."

"But he says no, and, though my heart is red, yet I cannot feel hard against him, for I would not turn against my people."

"So we must go alone, Sea Serpent."

"We are but a remnant of the great Penobscots, and though the pale-faces now call us the Kennebecs, we have not lost the blood of our fathers, nor ever will, while we live."

"Our women and children are dead, massacred by pale-faces, and let us dig up the hatchet again and die with our weapons in our hands."

"Do my warriors hear me?" and Keno the Kennebec turned to the warriors who had grouped in silence about him.

A low murmur of assent ran through the tawny-skinned braves, and then Sea Serpent asked:

"Where will our chief sail now?"

"To the island where we buried our iron guns when we laid down our war-weapons."

The schooner was at once headed for an island down the bay, and under a light breeze the pretty craft glided swiftly along.

A perfect model of a small war-vessel was the schooner of the Indian sailors.

Long, narrow, low amidships, with the gaunt look of a running hound, and masts that towered high in air, she presented the appearance of a craft that was not only able to sail like the

wind, but could drive through the roughest of waters.

Her crew were an odd lot, for they were full-blooded Indians, dressed in a half-white half-red-skin costume.

The schooner's decks were kept in perfect order, every rope was in its place, and she had the look of a craft under perfect discipline, and manned by thorough seamen, though they were Indians who were her crew.

The next night, shortly after twilight, the schooner ran into a little island of Casco Bay, and was warped alongside of a large rock a few feet higher than her decks.

Along the point of rocks, to the interior of the island, were built a number of fires, several braves being detailed to keep them burning brightly.

Upon the rock itself, against which the schooner lay, two large fires were set going, and these served to display every rope as distinctly as day.

Landing with his braves, something over three-score in number, Keno the Kennebec walked toward the interior of the island.

Just at the last fire was visible what appeared to be an old Indian burying-ground, for there still remained above the graves the rude monuments erected over the dead by the red-skins.

"This first," said Keno the Kennebec, pointing to a grave near, and his warriors, armed with shovels, began to dig down into the hard earth.

A couple of feet down the shovels struck a hard substance, and then, instead of a dead body being raised from the grave, out came a heavy gun.

The other graves were then opened, and securely put away in them were cannon, small-arms, boarding-pikes and cannon-carriages.

All were taken out, in a good state of preservation, for they had been securely wrapped, and on small wheelbarrows, were rolled to the rock and lowered to the deck of the schooner.

The red-skins worked like pieces of mechanism, for no orders were given, and each one seemed to know just what was to be done and did it.

As the cannon reached the decks they were mounted in their places, and the small-arms were racked, ready for use.

The next day was passed in painting the schooner's sides with all kinds of odd devices, burnishing up the arms and unbending the canvas sails.

Then in their place were bent real buckskin sails, worked with strange Indian devices, and the third day after her arrival at the island the schooner put to sea, at her peak flying the black flag, in the center of which was an Indian chief in full war-paint and feathers.

Upon her decks were her crew, rigged out in buckskin leggings, beaded moccasins, and a coronet of feathers, while their bodies were bare, hideously painted, and about the waists of each was a belt of arms.

A wild, savage-looking crew they made, and a weird vessel they sailed in, while above them floated their outlaw flag.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RUTH'S VENTURE.

THERE was one thing that Doctor Rowland had not given up, and that was his idea that Nick Burton made the Hermit Isle his headquarters.

If such was the case he knew that there also would be the retreat of the smugglers.

Doctor Rowland was anxious to distinguish himself by the capture of the noted outlaws known as the Smugglers of Casco Bay, especially if in so doing he could get possession of Nick Burton.

It must be confessed that he did not like the one.

Proud, haughty, and possessing great wealth, the doctor looked forward to marrying his daughter off to a man of high position, and he well knew that there were many such who would be glad to win Ruth, if they had any encouragement to make the attempt.

Whether he really believed that Nick Burton had assassinated Lieutenant Duncan Reid is not known; but certain it is he wished the fugitive youth to be taken and executed for the crime as soon as possible.

He had seen Nick Burton in equally as close a place before, and under sentence of death as a pirate, and yet the midshipman had, by making his escape, proven that he was wholly guiltless, and more, had so well served his country as to be appointed into its navy for his gallant deeds.

Would he again turn up and cast the shadow off of him?

He feared that he might, if given time, and so he was anxious to have him at once taken.

If given time, by some strange means the middy might prove all clear, and fearing this, the more the doctor wished to have a chance to end his days ere it could be done.

He the more feared this from the fact, that when the old smuggler had himself and Lieutenant Mabrey, with his seamen, in his power, he meant to put them to death, while Nick Bur-

ton, on his arrival on board, had immediately ordered their release.

It might be, he thought, that Nick was playing some deep game, that would either bring him harm in the end, or at least gain him pardon for killing Duncan Reid as he had.

Thinking thus, Doctor Rowland was confident that Nick Burton was making his retreat upon the Hermits' Isle.

He knew that the midshipman wielded an immense influence over Keno, the Kennebec, and his crew of red-skins, and having seen him on board the smuggler vessel in the bay, where would be a better hiding-place for him than with Old Neptune and his daughter, who, loving the youth would not betray him?

"I'll man and arm a craft and go to that island and find him," said Doctor Rowland to Vivian Moreland after having given the maiden his views, as the reader knows them.

Vivian seemed to enter into his views, and soon after all that had been said was laid before Ruth.

Ruth became lost in deep meditation for awhile and then suddenly started up with:

"Vivi, you will help me, will you not?"

"You know that I will, Ru."

"Well, suppose you get a letter to-day calling you home, and I will write you a letter to that effect, so that you will not have to tell a story."

"But what good will that do, Ruth?"

"You must ask me to accompany you, and I will tell father I will go, if you will promise to return with me, and we will take the stage tomorrow morning."

"But Ru—"

"Hear me through, first, Vivi. We will take the stage, and to make all go well, I will have Rupert, the coachman, whom I can trust, drive after the stage, overtake it a few miles out and say that we have to return."

"Then Rupert can drive us around the town up to a point on the bay, where I will have Knowls, the boatman, who you know has some fine pleasure-craft, awaiting for us in his sloop, which father, you remember, has several times engaged for short cruises."

"Well, Ruth, what then?"

"I will have Knowls run us down the bay to the Hermits' Isle, and in some way make a landing, or communicate with that strange girl, Island Nell, and tell her frankly that an expedition is coming against the island."

"I will explain to her the uselessness of attempting resistance, and to let them land and make a thorough search, but, if Nick is there, to have him at once depart for a place of safety."

"Ruth, you are a brave, good girl; but are you not afraid to undertake this?"

"No, indeed, Vivian, for I would risk my life a hundred times to save Nick from death."

"And, for your sake, so would I; but we cannot be so uncomfortable on the sloop, for she is a nice craft, and Knowls is a good seaman; but will he and his men keep their mouths shut?"

"Yes, if I fill them with gold; besides, Knowls said the other day, so I heard, that no one could make him believe that Nick Burton had ever taken the life of Duncan Reid except in self-defense."

"But how about our return?"

"We will run up the bay in the afternoon, passing the town by night, and putting into Portsmouth take the stage from there home."

"You are a good plotter, Ruth, and I will be glad to go with you, for I shall enjoy the spice of adventure and romance in it."

"But now to set to work preparing, for we must see Knowls at once and arrange with Rupert the coachman, so there can be no mistake."

"First settle father, as soon as the post comes in with letters."

This was agreed upon, and fortunately for the two girls, the post brought a letter from her friends in Boston to Vivian, and which the doctor himself handed to her.

With an expression of chagrin, well assumed, Vivian told the doctor that she must go home at once, and would soon return, so asked Ruth to accompany her.

"I will gladly do so, Vivi, if father says so, for I am in a mood to need a change."

"Can I father?"

"Certainly, my child, and the trip will do you good," answered the doctor, who had been wondering what excuse he could give Ruth, when he departed on his cruise to Hermits' Island, for he did not wish his daughter to think that he was so determined to run down Nick Burton.

The absence of Ruth would give him just the chance he desired, so he readily gave his consent, and the maidens sallied forth to engage their seats in the stage.

This they did, and then they sauntered leisurely down to Knowls's boat-yard to arrange for the craft that was to take them upon their trip to Hermits' Isle.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE SECRET CRUISE.

KNOWLS, the pleasure-boatman, as he was called, from the fact that he kept pleasure-craft for hire to those who enjoyed sails upon the

beautiful waters surrounding Portland, was a strong old sailor who had been boatswain of a man-of-war, until caught when in port by a pretty little widow whose former husband had been lost at sea.

Left a comfortable home the grounds running to the water's edge, the widow was glad to catch the boatswain Knowls to look after her interests, while he, with the little he had laid by for a rainy day, bought pleasure-boats and a snug yacht for sailing-parties out, and the revenue he received was considerable.

To his home went Ruth and Vivian, and they found the Bo'sen, as he was called, at the little dock looking after his boats.

He greeted the young ladies with a salute he would have given an admiral, and said politely:

"How can the Bo'sen serve you, ladies?"

"Is the Mrs. Knowls engaged, Captain Knowls?" asked Ruth, with just enough Irish in her composition to blarney the Bo'sen by calling him captain.

"Yes, miss, The Widow is engaged just now; but you can see her, for she's a beauty," answered the pleased boatman.

"I mean your boat, your yacht, which I believe you call Mrs. Knowls?" said Ruth, thinking the boatman imagined her to have spoken of his wife.

"I know it, miss; it's the craft we both mean; but her name is The Widow, as I named her after my wife before she married me, you see."

"Oh, yes, and you say that she is engaged?"

"I have engaged to run a party down to Boston, miss."

"What do they pay you for the trip, if it is a fair question?"

"A cool fifty dollars, miss, and they get the stores themselves."

"For how long a time?"

"About four days to a week, miss."

"Well, I wish you would send them in another craft, which you can charter, and I'll not only pay you the charter money, but for the time of the man, or the men, you send, and will give you one hundred dollars for the use of your yacht for from three to four days."

"You are generous, indeed, miss, and I will go with you and send Caleb with the other party; but when do you wish to go?"

"Captain Knowls, we can trust you?"

"Certainly, miss."

"Well, we, my friend, Miss Moreland, and myself, wish to secretly visit the Hermits' Isle, and, that no one should know it, we are to start for Boston in the morning stage."

"But we leave the stage on the road and drive to a point two leagues above the town on the bay, at which point I wish you to be in waiting with your yacht."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, miss, The Widow'll be there if I have to pole her, there being no wind."

"Is it necessary to take any one with you?"

"I have a youth, Nat, I would like to have go, for he is poor, and I give him work when I can to help his widowed mother along."

"Can he keep a secret?"

"He is as close as an oyster, miss."

"Then engage Nat, and give him these for his services," and Ruth placed two gold eagles in the hands of the boatman, who said:

"This will four times pay him, miss, and more."

"Never mind, give it to him, and here is the money for yourself, and to buy stores with, which please put on board and have all in readiness."

"I will, miss, but you have given me two hundred dollars, and—"

"Keep it, and carry us there and back in safety, and I will add another hundred."

"Now good-by, and don't forget that this is to be as a dead secret."

"It shall be, Miss Rowland," was the answer, and the maidens walked rapidly back home.

In the morning the stage rolled up to the Rowland Manor, and the doctor placed the girls upon the back seat and bade them farewell, after which he went hastily down into the town to push ahead his work for the invasion of Hermits' Island.

Hardly had he left the mansion when Rupert drove out of the barn with the carriage, and sent the spirited horses along at a lively pace in chase of the stage.

It was an hour before he overtook the lumbering old coach, but he did so at last, a pretended message was delivered to Ruth, and the two maidens dismounted to enter the carriage and return home, Rupert having given as a cause that guests had arrived just after their departure.

Flanking the town Rupert went to the point on the coast where Ruth had directed him to drive, and upon arriving there the yacht was seen moored close inshore, while the Bo'sen was seated in his light skiff awaiting his fair passengers.

The transfer from the carriage to the yacht was soon made, Rupert started for home, and The Widow sped away on her cruise, wafted by a light three-knot breeze.

She was a saucy looking little craft, with plenty of beam and carrying capacity.

The cabin was commodious and comfortable,

and having it all to themselves, with plenty of the best the markets afforded on board, for the Bo'sen was a good caterer, the two maidens felt that the voyage, under other circumstances, could be a most enjoyable one.

"Nat" was a regular sailor boy, and a polite, quiet little fellow who enjoyed his work as though it was sport.

He had with him, as inseparable companions a monkey and a parrot, which his father had brought him years before from South America.

The parrot could talk, and the monkey was up to all kinds of tricks, so the two men were a source of amusement to Ruth and Vivian.

It was quite a little run down to Hermit's Isle, and as the wind was dead ahead and light, it was not to be expected that they would reach them before the next day.

But, when the sun arose the next morning the Hermit's Isle was in sight, and after they had finished their breakfast, they were within hailing distance and heard suddenly ring out from the shore:

"Sail ho! boat ahoy! boat coming!"

The parrot belonging to Nat seemed to recognize a shipmate in the one who hailed from the shore, for he yelled back again:

"Ay, ay, sir! Luff, sir, luff!"

"Anchor! drop anchor! ay, ay, sir!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DOCTOR'S PLOT.

DOCTOR ROWLAND, in his desire to capture Nick Burton, had again gone to Lieutenant Mabrey to aid him, for he wanted the backing of a Government officer.

But Calvin Mabrey told him candidly that having seen Nick Burton on board the smuggler schooner as its captain, he certainly would not torment Island Nell and her grandfather by again visiting them, nor would he allow his men to go.

The doctor had consequently to look elsewhere for aid.

He was chagrined by the refusal of Lieutenant Mabrey, but not disheartened.

Having determined to act wholly upon his own responsibility he sought a sailor's tavern.

It was the same one where Bronx and Sport had been seen in such comfort.

The doctor knew Mynbeer Stoll to be a man who was suspected of underhand work, but so far had been too shrewd a Dutchman to be caught in his evil acts, if he was in reality guilty.

Mynbeer Stoll was out, but Bronx sat in the tap room and heard what the doctor asked Beautv, the barmaid.

As Doctor Rowland left the inn Bronx got up and quickly followed him.

"I hope you'll excuse me, sir, but were you wanting any work done that a sailor can do, as I judge you were, from your coming to see the landlord?"

"Yes, my man, I do want some work done that I need good seamen to do."

"I'm in for it, sir, if it will pay, and I've met you before, sir."

"Indeed! and where?" asked the doctor.

"The night Burke the Buccaneer raided your house, sir."

"Ha! were you among his men?" asked Doctor Rowland anxiously.

"I was, sir, and the captain told me how sorry he was when he found out he was raiding the house of an old friend."

"A friend! do you dare accuse me of being the friend of a pirate?"

"I am a gentleman, sir, a man of honor and of wealth," and Doctor Rowland turned livid with anger.

Bronx smiled, and gave a sly wink, while he said:

"Yes, sir, so they all tell me; but I know that one time you and Captain Burke were messmates, and anything I can do for you, you have but to call on me, for just now I am out of a berth and not over rich."

Doctor Rowland seemed to be moved deeply by some internal emotion; but after awhile, with an effort, he controlled himself, and becoming calm again said:

"My man, I am glad to have met you."

"Your pirate captain was at one time in the service with me, when I was a naval officer, and naturally, when he attacked my house, after having turned pirate, and discovered who it was that he was raiding, he felt sorry and left the place without doing me any particular damage."

"Now, though you are a self-confessed pirate, for the sake of your captain I will not have you arrested, but give you something to do for me, as I did one other of your outlaw crew, one Jack Downes, who came to me in distress."

"I know Jack; but is he here now, sir?"

"No, he went on a little cruise with a party of us, and when left in charge of my yacht ran off with it."

"The villain, to treat a gentleman so when he was helping him as you were; but it was just like Jack."

"I feared that I had trusted the wrong man, for I engaged him for a special work and he did

not accomplish it, though doubtless would have done so, had not an accident arranged matters more to my liking."

"But now to yourself."

"Well, sir?"

"What are you doing?"

"Waiting a berth, sir."

"Are you particular?"

"Having served with Captain Burke, sir, I am not in the least particular."

"I meant to say, my man, are you particularly anxious to go to sea?"

"Anything, sir, is to my liking that brings gold."

"This is a frank answer, but I have chartered a small schooner, a Kennebec passenger craft, that I intend to take on a short voyage, and I would like a good crew."

"About how many, sir?"

"Twelve men, besides myself, you and a steward."

"I can get them, sir."

"Well, you do this for me."

"Promise them fifty dollars each for the run, be it three days or two weeks, and get men who can keep closed mouths."

"I will, sir."

"And men who are ready for any work they may have to do."

"Yes, sir."

"I will have the schooner ready to-morrow night to sail, and you will go as skipper."

"Thank you, sir."

"Here is some money for you personally, and if you have to pay the men any extra bounty, I will return it to you, and for yourself double the amount I now give you."

"Oh, thank you, sir," said Bronx, and having arranged a rendezvous with Doctor Rowland, he stood looking after him as he walked rapidly away.

A strange look was upon the man's face as he said:

"Well, I have another mine to work, and it shall pay me well, for I know all about you, my gallant doctor, and my silence is worth something."

"Let me see, I can get those men for twenty-five dollars each, and a bounty of five."

"This will give me a chance to pocket twelve times twenty-five, and I'll put in my bill for bounty at ten each, which puts in my pocket sixty dollars more."

"Then he wishes me to store the craft, and I can make another fifty out of that, so I'm in luck, and right glad am I that I didn't go with Sport on his little trip, for, with the two hundred the doctor gave me, and will double, I can take in nearly a thousand dollars for a few days' work, not to speak of future payments he will make me."

"Now, what is he after, running out of port in a schooner at night, with a crew of a dozen men, all well armed, and men who will do what they are ordered to do, without questions as to its propriety?"

Unable to answer this question, Bronx strolled down-town to have a look at the little craft that had been chartered by Doctor Rowland for the cruise.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STRANGE MEETING.

It was with considerable interest that both Ruth and Vivian gazed upon the Hermit's Isle, as the little yacht moved slowly toward it.

Bo'sen Knowls and Nat also regarded the island attentively, but with a feeling akin to awe, for, sailor-like, they possessed a great deal of superstition, and strange stories were told about Old Neptune, the Hermit of the Isle, and the mysterious manner of his life, some placing him as akin to Satan.

The hailing of Poll impressed Knowls and Nat also, and the answering of the boy's parrot made things lively in the air.

Poll seemed amazed at having his hail answered by one of his kind and shrieked and chattered like a bird gone mad, while Redhead the parrot on the yacht was equally excited, perhaps recognizing in his fellow's voice a long-lost tone that proved him to be of the same family as himself, and maybe out of the same nest in far-away South America.

The monkey subsided for once in his life, and climbing the mast sat on the cross-trees a silent lookout, wondering what it all meant.

Bo'sen Knowls did not know the island, except from hearsay, and cruised as near the reef as he dared.

In vain did he try to find a break, through which he would venture, although he made a complete circle about it.

The opening, or pass, that Island Nell knew so well, looked too wild even in that quiet sea, for him to attempt, so he contented himself with running up into the wind and dropping anchor.

As he did so a clear voice hailed from the shore and both Poll and Redhead were silenced, and Mischief the monkey, in his surprise, nearly lost his balance and fell to the deck.

"Yacht ahoy!"

"Ay ay," answered Bo'sen Knowls.

"No craft is allowed to anchor near this island, so up with your anchor and go elsewhere."

"That is Island Nell's voice, miss," said the Bo'sen.

"I will answer her then," responded Ruth, and raising her silvery voice to its highest pitch, she cried:

"Is that Island Nell?"

"I am Island Nell," came back the answer.

"I have come here to seek an interview with you."

"Who are you?"

"That I will tell you when we meet."

"I do not care to meet you."

"Do not fear that I mean you harm, for would two girls come here to do you injury?"

"I do not fear harm, for I allow no one to land," was the plucky response.

"Will you not permit me to speak with you, for I will come out in my boat alone?"

"Will you dare land alone on this island?"

"Yes."

"Ah Ruth! do not do so," cried Vivian.

"No, miss, it hain't safe," said Knowls.

"Let me go, miss," put in Nat.

"No, I will go," answered Ruth firmly, and then came Island Nell's reply:

"I will come out for you in my skiff."

Soon after the little white skiff shot out of the basin, Nell handling the oars with strength and skill, and, passing through the seething waters of the pass, dashed out to where the yacht lay at anchor.

"I know you now; you are Ruth Rowland," said Island Nell calmly, as she turned her skiff and rowed it stern-foremost up to the yacht's side.

"Yes, I am Ruth Rowland," answered Ruth quietly, and then added:

"I have come here to have a talk with you."

"Your father was here a short while since, with some sailors, but I drove them off."

"I have not come for harm, but for your good."

"Will you come into the cabin and let me have a talk with you?"

"No, you must return in my boat with me, if you wish to talk with me."

"Very well. I will do so," and Ruth, against the wishes of Vivian, the Bo'sen and Nat, who openly urged her not to go, fearlessly stepped into the skiff and took her seat, while Island Nell, dropping her oars into the water sent the light boat flying toward the Reef Pass.

Ruth was anxiously watched by those on the yacht, as the daring girl at the oars sped into the rough waters, and passing through them in safety headed for the basin.

Presently the skiff disappeared from the sight of the watchers, as it glided into the basin, and a moment after ran out upon the beach.

"Will you land and sit there in that arbor and tell me why you have come here?" asked Nell quietly.

"Yes, it is a pleasant spot for a talk," answered Ruth, and the two walked to the little arbor seat together.

Ruth sat down, while Nell remained standing, and the former said:

"Will you not sit down by me?"

"No, I will stand and hear what you have to say."

"You are angry with me, I fear."

"Why should I be?"

"Well, I hardly know excepting that it was said you loved Midshipman Burton, and he asked me to be his wife."

"I do love him, and I do not wonder that he loves you, for you are so beautiful," was the frank response of Island Nell.

"I thank you for saying so, and honestly I can tell you that you are most beautiful, and, strange to say, you remind me of Nick Burton."

"Do I? How strange, for often I have thought that Nick and I looked alike, but I could not understand it."

"Yes, you are strangely like him, for you have the same earnest eyes and expressive mouth."

"I wish that you were his sister, that you might love me."

"I do not hate you, for I could not if I would."

"I have loved Nick from the first, and yet he never told me one word of love, so I could not blame him for loving you."

"Had he been my lover, and you, knowing that he was such, had enticed him from me, then I would have killed you, I believe."

"But I think I can love you and trust you, though I fear and hate your father," and Island Nell's eyes flashed fire.

"It is of both Nick and my father that I have come to see you."

"Indeed? What of them?"

"You know that Nick is in trouble of course?"

"Yes, I heard it from your father, when he came here to look for him."

"You know that he fled to save his life?"

"Yes."

"Is he here?"

"He is not."

"Pardon my asking you, but I do so for Nick's safety and your good, for I know that an expedition is now fitting out to come here and reach your island."

"Let them come if they dare!" fiercely said Island Nell.

"No, you must not talk that way, and it is for this reason that I secretly left home to come and see you.

"An armed vessel will come, and they will gain a landing against all resistance.

"If you were to fire upon them, and kill any of their number, you and your grandfather, who, I have heard is a very old man, would be dragged off to jail.

"If you allow them to land and search your island, you will let them see for themselves that Nick Burton is not here, nor are you the receivers of smuggled goods.

"So take my advice, Island Nell, for it is well meant, and do not put your own lives in jeopardy by resisting them who come as Government officers."

Ruth had spoken earnestly, and her words and manner impressed Island Nell, who answered:

"I thank you, Ruth Rowland, for coming to me as you did, and I will do as you advise me to do."

"It is so good of you to say this, for now I feel that I am repaid for my coming; but one thing let me ask you?"

"Well?"

"Do you know where Nick Burton is?"

"I do not."

"I am sorry, for I wished to have him receive this letter."

"I tell you the truth, when I say that I do not know where Nick is; but, if you will trust me with the letter I will try and find out and give it to him."

"It is very good of you, and I will leave it in your hands."

"It is not sealed, as you see, and in it I tell him that I still trust in his honor, and that he can yet put away the clouds that are upon him."

"You are deserving of his love, when you do not desert him, and I hope for your sake, as well as his own, he will prove himself all that you believe him to be."

"Will you come up to my cabin, and meet my grandfather, and the rest of our family?"

"I thought that you and your grandfather were the only dwellers here?" said Nell in surprise.

"No, there are dogs, cats, birds and a very naughty parrot."

"Ah! I should be happy indeed to meet the family," said Ruth with a light laugh, and Island Nell led her up to the cabin.

Old Neptune started with surprise at sight of a stranger on the island, and that stranger a young girl; but he arose and in a courtly way greeted her, while Poll shouted:

"Pretty girl! take seat, pretty girl! get out, dogs!"

After a long visit, in which she became deeply interested in all that she saw on the island, Ruth took her departure. Nell rowing her out to the yacht, and being urged to do so, getting on board and being introduced to Vivian.

A pleasant chat, and then the island maid returned to her skiff, and, getting up his anchor Bo'sen Knowls set sail and headed back for port, while the sun began to fling long shadows as it neared the western horizon.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BO'SEN'S RUSE.

"We have done splendidly, Vivi, and will get home much sooner than we expected," said Ruth, addressing Vivian, as the yacht slowly left the Hermits' Isle astern.

"Yes, indeed, and it is such a consolation to know that that beautiful girl will not get herself into trouble by firing upon your father's party, and also, that Nick is not concealed there, for I believe her when she says he is not."

"Oh, yes, he is not there, and not being, I fear, proves that he is on that smuggler schooner; but it is for some good, I feel assured, as in the case of his having been on the Indian Pirate craft, you remember."

"Your trust is beautiful, Ruth," said Vivian.

"Where my love is I cannot doubt; but the wind seems to be failing us," and the two girls, who were seated amidships arose and walked aft to consult Bo'sen Knowls.

"Yes, leddies, the wind is going slowly, and it doesn't look to me as though we'd get it again before moon-up, if we do then," said Knowles.

For half an hour more the yacht was lying at anchor in the sheltered basin of an island, for seeing that he was going to be becalmed, the Bo'sen had made his way there with the last puffs of the dying breeze.

The moon arose about an hour before midnight, and yet no breeze came with it, and confident that there would be none until sunrise, the Bo'sen and Nat followed the example of Ruth and Vivian and sought rest.

The Bo'sen was up at sunrise, but seeing not a breath of air, returned to his berth forward, as he knew that there was no hurry, for Ruth had told him they preferred not to sail by day near the port.

At a late hour the maidens came on deck and Nat had breakfast for them, and a tempting one, for the boy was a fine cook.

There was still not a breath of air, so they

contented themselves with roaming over the islands and rowing about the waters in the light skiff attached to the yacht.

At sunset a good breeze sprung up, and the Bo'sen headed the yacht for port, which destination was Portsmouth, as Ruth and Vivian wished to catch the stage from there back to Portland.

They had not left the shelter of the island more than a couple of hours, when suddenly out from a group of islands shot a schooner, and not three cable-lengths distant. Bo'sen Knowls at once put the yacht away, and called to Nat to run up the topsail as quickly as possible, for he hoped to reach the shelter of some islands near and thus dodge his enemy, for enemy he felt the strange craft to be.

But the yacht was already seen by those on the schooner, and loud came the hail:

"Lay that yacht to, or I fire into you."

The Bo'sen dared not disobey the command, and the yacht was quickly run up into the wind, while again the hail from the schooner was heard:

"Send a boat aboard here and report who and what you are!"

"Ay, ay, sir," shouted the Bo'sen, and then, while Nat was hauling the skiff alongside, he continued aloud to the maidens:

"That is lucky, for maybe I can fool him; but if he had sent a boat aboard I think he'd have seen a chance for ransom."

"You deem him a pirate, then, or a smuggler?" asked Ruth, in a voice that trembled.

"It looks bad, miss; but I shall soon know."

Then turning to Nat he said:

"Nat, I'll take the big boat, and you get the ladies into the skiff on the lee side."

"You see we are just in a line with yonder islands, and so they won't see you, and if things go wrong I'll just hail you with an order to drop your anchor over."

"You do this, and then get into the skiff and pull for the islands."

"You can follow the island chain, you know, around to the mainland, and if I get off I'll come in your wake with the yacht."

"But if you do not get away, Captain Knowls?" asked Ruth.

"Oh, I will, for I'll play pirate with the worst of 'em until I can escape; but I hope all will go well, only, if not, look out for my call to drop the anchor and then go."

"Are you not coming on board here, you lubber?" shouted a stern voice from the schooner.

"Ay, ay, sir, I'm on my way," and Bo'sen Knowls pulled hastily for the schooner.

Arriving there he discovered the craft to be armed and that there was but a small crew on board.

"Well, sir, you took your time, I suppose, because you saw that we had no boats and were short-handed."

"Who and what are you?" and the speaker, who was no less a personage than the gray-haired Smuggler of Casco Bay, met the Bo'sen at the gangway.

"I am a boatman, sir, out of Portland, with a small sailing-party on board."

"Ah! then there should be ransom-money in the party, for you people don't go sailing for pleasure."

The Bo'sen made no reply, and the smuggler continued:

"Well, I must put back yonder into the channel among the islands to meet our captain and the boats, and then I'll see how rich a haul I've made out of you."

"How many are there on board?"

"Only four, sir."

"Well, you go with me, skipper, so order your crew to drop anchor and await your return; but mind you, we'll not have your craft out of range, so do not think she can escape us."

"She'll not move, sir, until my return," answered the Bo'sen, and then raising his voice he called out:

"Ho, Nat!"

"Ay, ay, cap'n," answered the boy.

"The schooner will be standing off and on to that large group of islands, and keeps me on board, so drop your anchor."

"Do you hear?"

"Ay, ay, sir," answered Nat, and the splash of the iron in the water reached the ears of those upon the little schooner.

The smuggler then gave orders for the schooner to fall off and head back to where the boats were to meet her, and the Bo'sen, keeping his eyes upon his yacht, saw the skiff glide away from her side toward the other group of islands to which he had directed Nat to go for shelter.

"Well, the ladies are safe, anyhow, and I'll make terms for my release, I guess," he muttered, delighted that the maidens at least had escaped, and feeling confident that in Nat's charge they were safe.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE CHASE BY MOONLIGHT.

THE moment that Nat heard the hail from the Bo'sen he sprung to obey the order, and the anchor was let fall with a splash, and the yacht rode easily with her mainsail and jib set.

Disregarding any extra work for himself, Nat had hastily put in the little skiff the small mast, sail and rudder, a basket of provisions and a keg of water, for he did not know how long it might be before they reached a haven.

The maidens were already seated in the skiff, so that Nat ran and got into his place, and sent the frail boat gliding over the waters with a few vigorous but noiseless strokes of his paddle.

"The schooner is heading for the islands yonder," said Nat, as the smuggler craft fell off and sailed away.

"What can it mean?" Ruth asked.

"Guess the cap'n has seen there's something wrong and wanted us to git, for that craft don't have a honest look to my eye," remarked Nat.

"Well, Captain Knowls shall never have cause to regret his self-sacrifice," Ruth responded.

"Nor you, Nat, that you have had to become our preserver," Vivian said.

"No, indeed, Nat, you will be well repaid for your good services, and can make your mother's heart happy and her home comfortable, while she shall know how much we appreciate you," Ruth rejoined.

By this time the skiff had reached the shelter of the first island, and they felt safe, so Nat raised the little triangular sail and went gliding along the shores of the island group.

As they were under the lee of the islands the skiff did not get the full force of the breeze, and Nat did not care to run far out, fearing he might be discovered, so their speed was not very great.

Thus several hours passed, and then, glancing astern, Ruth uttered a cry of alarm, which caused Vivian and Nat to start and look behind them.

There, not more than half a mile distant, some distance out from the shore so that the wind could strike her sails squarely, was a vessel dashing swiftly along, evidently in pursuit of the skiff.

"Don't be scared, leddies, it's the Bo'sen's yacht," cried Nat, recognizing the craft at a glance.

"But foes may be upon her, and in chase," said Ruth.

"That's so. Will you let me have a squint through your glass?"

Ruth handed her small spy-glass to the boy, who quickly turned it upon the yacht.

"No, I see only one person on board, and as the moon is rising yonder, I'll get a look at his face afore long."

"Yes, it's the Bo'sen," he added, eagerly.

Instantly the skiff was luffed up, the sail lowered, and they anxiously awaited the approach of the yacht.

In a few moments it ran near, luffed, and Nat ran the skiff alongside, and the maidens sprung on board.

"Thank Heaven! you are safe, Captain Knowls," cried Ruth.

"Yes, miss, I'm safe; but I'm just out o' the hands of the Philistines."

"They were indeed pirates then?"

"Yes, miss, they are pirates; and I seen that aboard that craft I would not have believed had I not seen it with my own eyes."

"What was it?" asked Ruth, falteringly.

"Well, miss, the craft is the one known as the Smuggler of Casco Bay, and she was laying to among the islands, the boats having all gone ashore to hide some treasure, I suppose."

"Well, I told the white-haired officer they call Captain Paul, and whom I supposed always was the skipper, that I had a pleasure-party out for a sail, and he allowed that poor folks didn't pleasure sail, so there must be a ransom on board, and he'd keep me until the captain's return aboard."

"Then it was I hailed Nat as I did, and it made my heart glad to see you all get away."

"It was a noble sacrifice on your part, Captain Knowls, and one that we will not forget!"

"Now, Miss Ruth, it's a man's place to sacrifice himself for woman, I contend, so I did but my duty; but the schooner put over to the group of islands, and soon the boats came alongside, pretty well filled with men."

"The white-haired officer met the captain at the gangway, and told him about capturing me."

"I heard but little that was said, only that my name was called by the lieutenant."

"Then came:

"Release that man and his yacht at once, sir."

"With this the real captain passed on into the cabin, and then it was, as the light fell upon him as he stepped into the companionway, that I saw that which I told you I had to behold with my own eyes to believe."

"And what was that?" asked Vivian, while Ruth remained silent.

"It was Nick Burton that was captain of the craft!"

Ruth groaned, while Vivian said earnestly:

"You are sure of this, Captain Knowls?"

"Miss Vivian, I know Nick Burton's face and form better than I do yours, and I cannot be mistaken."

"I asked the officer to let me have a talk with Mr. Burton, but he brought back word that he would not see me, but ordered my instant silence, so I went on board the yacht, and came at once in pursuit."

"Do you still doubt, Ruth?" whispered Vivian.

"Yes, for like Captain Knowls, I must see with my own eyes before I believe, and more, if it is Nick Burton, he is not on that craft as a real outlaw, but one who is serving some purpose in being there."

Vivian said no more, and the yacht was at once put back on her course, the yawl and skiff being in tow, for there was no immediate haste.

As she swept into the wide channel between the two islands, another sail was sighted, which at first was believed to be the smuggler schooner.

But the Bo'sen, after a long look through his glass, said:

"That is not the smuggler, but a small schooner out of Portland harbor, and more, she is heading so as to cut us off."

"Here, Nat, take the tiller while I haul the boats aboard, for yonder craft has no teeth to bite with, and I believe The Widow can drop him in a fair race."

Nat sprang to the tiller, and then the man readily hauled the boats on board, after which an extra jib was set and the topsail run up.

The wind was brisk and steady, and the yacht flew merrily along, the strange schooner now in full chase.

"She gains, but mighty slowly," said the Bo'sen.

But, as the wind freshened the schooner began to creep up more rapidly, and it was very evident that she would overhaul the yacht in an hour or so.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the two vessels, crowded with sail, went speeding along at a merry pace; but those on the yacht were too anxious to enjoy the race, for Ruth had sounded the key-note of alarm by the words, after a long look at the schooner through her glass:

"Oh! Vivian! that is the schooner my father chartered for his expedition to the Hermits' Isle!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN UNEXPECTED DELIVERANCE.

THE thought that, after successfully reaching Hermits' Isle, warning Nell of her intended visitors, and receiving her promise not to wage war with them, also of discovering that Nick Burton was not in concealment there, that she was to be captured by her father, was a bitter one indeed, not only to Ruth Rowland, but also to Vivian.

The two sat together in the cockpit, eagerly watching the coming schooner, and how she was gaining upon them.

They saw that the Bo'sen and Nat were doing their best, and The Widow was held to her work unswervingly.

Carrying full sail she went rushing through the waters at a pace that seemed terrific; but the schooner's large hull had the advantage in the rough waters.

"I wish we could reach yonder islands, led-dies, for we might dodge him then," said the Bo'sen, pointing ahead, where the moonlight revealed, half a league away, a group of small islands.

"He is not half a mile astern of us, captain, and we have thrice that distance to sail," said Ruth, taking in the situation.

"Yes, and he will overhaul us just as we get off the islands, so it will give us no time to dodge him; but I shall hold on to the last, hoping for something to turn up—Nat!"

"Ay, ay, cap'n."

"Haul the jib halyard a leetle more taut, and then all lay out to windward, for this breeze is freshening, and she'll need every pound to balance her, as we are carrying too much cloth for ordinary circumstances."

Nat promptly obeyed his orders, and then took his place as far to windward as he could get, Ruth and Vivian also seating themselves outside of the combing, and caring nothing for the seas that often broke over the bows.

Seeing that the yacht needed more trimming, Nat went forward and hauled the anchors up to windward also.

Thus for some minutes the yacht flew on her way, reeling badly at times; but, though she often went dangerously far over, the Bo'sen knew his craft well and held her at it, not once easing her with the helm, and the result was that she shot off at times as though she would fairly spring out of the water.

"She is doing nobly, led-dies, for she's amazing like her namesake; but it's no use in this rough sea, for the schooner will run alongside of us in less than ten minutes more."

"Suppose we go below, Ruth, and Captain Knowls can tell who he is, and doubtless he will be allowed to go free," said Vivian.

"I think, miss, they that are on yonder schooner want this yacht to go with them on their cruise, for they would not run off their course, as they have, in chase, if they meant to let us go again."

"Captain Knowls, I have reason to believe that my father commands yonder vessel, for he intended to charter a craft and man her, for an expedition to Hermits' Isle, and he is due in this locality, I should judge just about this time."

"It would be too bad, miss, to have him overhaul us, and your secret come out."

"I will get you to hide in the cabin, and I'll try my best to get off; but if I cannot, you must not blame me."

"No, no, nor will I; but is all hope of escape gone from us?" dejectedly said Ruth.

"I see not the shadow of a chance now, led-dies, for—"

"Sail ho!" suddenly sung out Nat's shrill voice, and the moonlight flashed upon the white sails of a vessel that suddenly merged into view from behind the island group ahead.

"The smuggler as I live!" cried the Bo'sen in glee.

"See the chase!" shouted Nat, and all eyes were turned upon the pursuing schooner, which suddenly went about as though on a pivot and started down the bay with all speed.

"Ha! ha! ha! he chased a dove and run upon a hawk, so now flies; ha! ha! ha!" laughed Bo'sen Knowls.

"But you said that was the smuggler, captain?"

"Yes, Miss Ruth, and he's spreading all sail in chase of the schooner, which will have to do her best to keep out of the smuggler's clutches."

"But are we safe?"

"Oh, yes, for as I told you, Nick Burton commands yonder craft."

"Oh! can it be true?" sighed Ruth Rowland.

"She'll pass us near, miss, and I'll make it as near as I dare, so you can see for yourself if he is on deck."

Ruth fairly trembled, for she knew not what to say or do.

At last she said:

"Do so, good Captain Knowls, go as near as you dare, and I will thank you."

The smuggler schooner was now coming on in full chase, and that the craft that had been chasing them was its game could be seen by the crew setting all the sail she could carry.

That she would pass near the yacht was evident, but the Bo'sen wished a closer view, and so headed as to be able to go as near as it was safe to do.

Nat took in the topsail and a jib, so that The Widow behaved better and was held on a course that would cause her to go just astern of the schooner, if she held on the course she then was steering.

Nearer and nearer the vessels drew to each other, and on the yacht Ruth and Vivian sat, with their spy-glasses in hand.

Nearer and nearer, until they were in hailing distance.

"Ho that yacht!" came to their ears in manly tones.

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the Bo'sen.

"What schooner is that ahead?"

"I do not know, sir; but I think she is out of Portland."

"Was she not in chase of you?"

"Yes, sir, and I thank you for scaring her off."

"You are welcome, my man," came back the answer, just as the long bowsprit of the yacht seemed about to strike the schooner's taffrail.

"Look, Ruth, look!" cried Vivian in suppressed tones, and she grasped the arm of her friend with one hand, while with the other she motioned to a tall form standing on the schooner's quarter-deck and gazing attentively at the yacht.

The moon shone brightly, and its clear, silvery light fell upon the face and form of the man whom Vivian Moreland had pointed out, and Ruth beheld, with painful recognition, just who it was, for she said, in low, quivering tones:

"Oh, Vivian! it is Nick Burton indeed!"

"Has he fallen thus low, to herd with pirates, or is there some deep mystery in all this which I cannot fathom?"

"God only knows, my poor Ruth!" answered Vivian, and just then a stern order was heard on the schooner, followed immediately after by a red glare and deep boom commingled, as a heavy gun sent an iron messenger after the vessel so swiftly flying from her.

"Oh, Vivian! my father is on yonder craft, and what will be his fate?" cried Ruth, with renewed cause of alarm, as she saw how in deadly earnest the smugglers were to capture the fugitive schooner.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE BITER BITTEN.

THE schooner, as Ruth had inferred, which had given the yacht Widow such a hot chase by moonlight, was indeed the craft which her father had chartered for his cruise down the bay to invade the island of the Hermits.

It was a good craft, fleet and stanch, and Bronx, in spite of his cut in pay, had gotten good men for rough work.

Bronx seemed just the man to organize an expedition of that kind, and had his men ready

on the vessel, a good cook on board, the stores and small-arms in place, and all in readiness at the appointed time.

The doctor came off from his pier in a small boat, rowed by the boatman of Rowland Manor, and upon reaching the deck assumed command, though Bronx was left to do the work.

The schooner was put on her course, and so secret did Doctor Rowland wish to keep his expedition that he left port at a late hour of the night, and did all in his power to prevent attracting attention.

The breeze was fresh, the schooner sailed well, and he was going along at a lively pace, when the little yacht was sighted.

He did not know The Widow by sight, nor did Bronx and the rest of the crew, so he gave orders to at once start in chase, as he might, he believed, find that the small sloop held Island Nell, and perhaps Nick Burton.

At any rate he seemed to think the yacht was not engaged in honest work, and should be overhauled and investigated.

To chase her was one thing, and to catch her another, as Doctor Rowland found; but having started in pursuit, and seeing that he was gaining he determined to keep on until he had run the fugitive craft down and discovered just what she was and who was on board.

Wearing tarpaulins upon their heads, and storm coats which Bo'sen Knowls had given them to put on to protect them from the seas, the two maidens looked like rough tars; and so Doctor Rowland's strong glass could not penetrate their disguise, and little did he dream that the fugitives were his own daughter and affianced bride, whom he believed to be in Boston, there in that little runaway pleasure-sloop.

Just as he began to congratulate himself that the chase was ended, the smuggler schooner came into view, not a mile distant.

Instantly the doctor recognized her, and loudly rung out his orders to put his schooner about and start in flight.

A few moments after the pursuer became the pursued, and a second chase began, while the yacht was left to go on her way in peace.

The hope of those on board the schooner, that the smuggler would delay to pick up the yacht, was quickly banished, as she was seen to sweep by the sloop without checking her speed.

"We are his game, and we must make every effort to escape," cried Doctor Rowland, and the crew did all in their power to help their vessel in her hot pace.

But the smuggler schooner came on like a race-horse, and gained on the smaller vessel as surely as had that craft overhauled the yacht, and it became but a question of time.

With his fourteen men besides himself, Doctor Rowland knew how utterly impossible it would be to resist the crew of the smuggler.

He was aware that Nick Burton had once before spared his life; but would he do so again?

He had doubtless heard of his hostility to him, and determination to hunt him to the gallows, and he might be only too anxious to retaliate.

Nick Burton had heard also, doubtless, of Ruth Rowland's trust in him, and, with her father out of the way, and the secret of his taking off locked up in his heart, he might dare to boldly run into port and carry his daughter off with him as a pirate's bride.

Such were the thoughts that filled the mind of Doctor Rowland, as the smuggler craft came rushing on in pursuit.

"Well, Bronx, it looks as though we were to be taken," he said sadly.

"It does look that way, sir, and in a short time too," answered Bronx.

"What would you advise?"

"You are the doctor, sir, and it's for you to say," was the rather unsatisfactory response.

"I have reason to believe that yonder vessel is commanded by a young naval officer who is my worst enemy."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Yes, he was engaged to marry my daughter, but I never liked him."

"He was poor, his parents were light-house keepers, and yet he got an appointment into the navy, but shot a superior officer through jealousy, and is now a fugitive from justice and turned pirate."

"Ah, yes, sir, I heard of the affair. He killed Lieutenant Reid, I believe, shooting him down like an assassin."

"He did, as the dying officer stated; but I had hopes of finding him on Hermits' Isle, and that is why I was going there, for I believe also that the Hermits—an old man and a girl—are smugglers, and have their island full of stores they are concealing."

"If that is the case, sir, we would make a rich haul of it."

"Yes; but I would rather find the fugitive—Nick Burton—there, than all the smuggled booty the island could hold."

"You are bitter against him, sir."

"I wish to see him out of the way."

"If we find him then, there is a reward for him, too."

"Oh, yes, and you can divide that among

you; but I fear you will not get the reward, as I think he is on yonder craft."

"I hope not, sir, for it looks as though we were going to be overhauled."

"Yes, we cannot escape him— Ha! there goes a gun."

As Doctor Rowland uttered the words, a flash came from the bows of the pursuing smuggler, followed by the boom of a heavy gun and the roar of a solid shot, as it went flying over the schooner's decks.

"If we could reach the islands yonder, sir, fire the schooner and take to the boats, we could elude him," said Bronx.

"Yes, but those islands are yet far off, and— There comes another shot."

This shot came flying nearer to the fugitive craft, and caused the crew to dodge as it went shrieking above their heads.

But still Doctor Rowland held on his course.

Then a third shot was fired, and, striking the water just in the wake of the little schooner, it sent the spray upon her decks.

"He is improving by practice, sir," said Bronx, coolly.

"Yes; but as long as he does us no material damage, I shall hold on."

"There comes the damage, sir!" cried Bronx, almost immediately following the doctor's remark, as a shot tore through the sails.

Another shot cut away the maintopmast, a third tore up the taffrail, sending a shower of splinters about that wounded several of the crew, though Doctor Rowland and Bronx escaped unharmed.

"We are catching it, sir," somewhat anxiously said Bronx.

"Yes, but we must catch it far worse before I obey his demand to lay to," was the grim reply.

Bronx said nothing, but suddenly went forward to aid in repairing damages, he told the doctor.

But he whispered to each man.

"Lad, when I return, you come aft with your shipmates and demand that reckless fool to surrender the craft."

"Tell him the money don't call for such risks."

"Ay ay, sir," was the ready answer, and as Bronx returned to the quarter-deck a shot tore along, from stem to stern, ripping up the planking, killing one man and wounding two more.

With a run the men came aft, and one of them acting as spokesman, said, addressing the doctor:

"Cap'n, we are taking too big chances, sir, for the money we get, and we call for a surrender."

"Men, I command this craft, not you, and I shall do as I please in the matter, so back to your posts," was the stern response.

"No, sir, not one inch," said the leader.

"I will pay you well for your work."

"Gold will do us no good when we are dead."

"Cowards! back to your posts, or I shoot the man who disobeys," shouted Doctor Rowland in a rage, drawing his pistol as he spoke.

"You'll have to shoot us all then, sir, for we don't go; and more, we lay this craft to."

"Come, Bronx, aid me to drive these mutineers back," cried Doctor Rowland, and he sprung forward, firing his pistol as he did so.

A man fell dead at his feet, but the others threw themselves upon him like a pack of tigers, just as a shot from the smuggler cut the rudder chains and the little schooner broached to.

"Hang him lads!" was the cry, and the men were in earnest.

Bronx sprung forward to stem the current he had undammed, but he was thrust rudely aside and the infuriated mutineers seized upon a rope, placed it about the neck of their victim, and sent one of their number up into the rigging to pass one end over the gaff, that they might drag their leader up to die.

But the smuggler had not been idle the while, and during the excitement on the little schooner the helmsman had steered wildly, so that when the shot caused the fugitive craft to run up into the wind, the pursuer was right upon her almost.

Blinded by their rage the crew of the little craft did not see their foes until they felt the shock as the two schooners came together.

Over the bulwarks sprang a tall form, a score of men at his back, and in an instant the leader took in the situation.

With a bound he reached the mutineers, and one sweep of his cutlass sent them flying from his path, while he quickly released Doctor Rowland.

"Hal again do you save my life, Nick Burton?"

"But, by Heaven, it but intensifies my hatred for you," said Doctor Rowland savagely.

Then he added, as the one he addressed made no reply:

"I suppose you have saved me from being hanged by those coward mutineers, to hang me yourself!"

"No, sir, you are free to go with your vessel; had I known what craft I was chasing, and that you were on board, I would never have pursued you."

"Good-night, Doctor Rowland, your vessel is free, but I warn you if you attempt a landing upon Hermits' Isle, or harm one hair of the heads of those who dwell there, you will rue it."

"To your schooner, men!" he called out, as he ceased speaking to Doctor Rowland and the crew of the little craft, who had been made prisoners, were released and the smugglers returned to their own vessel, which at once sailed away, leaving the little schooner pretty well used up.

Having had time to cool their anger down, the crew were no longer mutinous, and Bronx going among them quickly got matters to working right.

The doctor was in an intense rage, at all that had occurred; but the lesson he had received subdued him, and he gave his orders to repair damages in his usual way.

It took some time to get things ship-shape again, but at last the schooner was in condition to set sail, and Doctor Rowland ordered Bronx to put her on her way to Hermits' Isle.

"The men heard what the smuggler said, sir, and I fear they will refuse to go."

"Curses on them! do they intend to mutiny again?"

"I fear they will if you urge it, sir."

"Well, we can but try them."

"Ho, lads, do you continue your cruise with me as before?" he called out.

"No, sir, this craft goes back to port," was the stern response of the leader of the mutineers.

"I will pay you handsomely if you will go."

"Talk costs nothing, gold in hand tells the truth," said the spokesman.

"Do you mean that you wish pay in advance?"

"That is it."

"Well, come aft, and I will give you a hundred each."

"It's a bargain," said the ringleader, and the money, taken from the doctor's supply he carried with him, was paid into the hands of the crew.

"Now, cap'n, your time of punishment has come, for we hain't forgot that you kilt one o' our number."

With these words the mutineers threw themselves upon Doctor Rowland, before he could offer any resistance and he was quickly seized and heavily ironed.

Then he was placed in an open boat, without oar or sail, and set adrift, Bronx in vain begging the men to spare him, and the doctor himself offering a large ransom for his life.

But the mutineers were merciless, the boat was cast adrift, and the schooner headed for a distant port, where they intended to sell it and pocket the proceeds, along with the gold which they had robbed their victim of.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BRONX A MAN FOR THE OCCASION.

WHEN the mutineers so summarily disposed of Doctor Rowland, by setting him adrift, gagged and in irons in an oarless boat, Bronx took in the situation at a glance.

He noticed that the tide had just begun to run in, and that the boat must thereby drift in a certain direction.

At the turn of the tide, the boat would begin to set seaward, if it had not lodged somewhere on an island.

Before it could thus get out to sea, and out of sight of land, many hours must elapse.

If it lodged on some island, it would be within a few miles of where they then were, doubtless, and there it would remain until the next full tide, and perhaps longer.

Having taken these circumstances into consideration, for a purpose which will be eventually disclosed, he determined to make the best of the situation as it was.

So he went to where the men were grouped, talking over their affairs, and said:

"Lads, I cannot say that you have done right in setting the doctor adrift to die, but that is your lookout and not mine."

"However, as you have done so, and the command of this craft devolves upon me, I must look to our safety."

"Our safety?" asked one.

"Yes, for Doctor Rowland is a prominent man, and search will be made for him, when he does not return, so my idea is that we run at once to Portsmouth, say that we were chased, crippled and robbed by a pirate, and the marks on the craft will carry us out, as also will the fact that we have no cargo."

"We can say, or rather I can, that I am disgusted, and sell the craft for the highest cash price I can get for her, and this I will divide equally among us, and each man can go where he pleases, though I would not advise him to return to Portland, as it is well known just who sailed with Doctor Rowland."

"What say you, lads?"

The offer of Bronx was received with unanimous consent, as the best thing that could be done, and the schooner was at once headed for sea, and then put on her course for Portsmouth.

A good run was made, and the harbor was entered early in the afternoon, and Bronx told

his story, and readily found a purchaser for the schooner.

The eight seamen with him, and the cook, then received their share of the money, which was just exactly, as a total for all of them, what Bronx got for himself, he having told them he had to sacrifice the craft for a very small sum as he dared not wait there longer.

The mutineers were satisfied, however, not knowing that they had been cheated in the division of their ill-gotten spoils, and they hastily shipped on what vessels they could get aboard of that were to leave port at once.

Bronx, however, caught the stage for Portland, and arriving there that night, hastened down to the boat-yard of Bo'sen Knowls.

The Bo'sen was not at home, so his wife said, but she was ready to transact any business for him, and Bronx hastily chartered a small cat-rig sail-boat, put aboard of it the necessary stores and set sail, running out of the harbor in a little over twenty-four hours after the setting adrift of Doctor Rowland by the mutineers.

Though Bronx was not very familiar with the waters adjacent to Portland, he had, like Sport, a vast deal of confidence in himself, and hence went alone on his cruise, for he was not anxious to have company.

Feeling his way along in the moonlight, he at last saw dawn breaking, and soon after discovered that he had reached the locality where they had set Doctor Rowland adrift.

The tide was running out, so he made for the outer chain of islands to search up and down the coast.

Landing on an island he ascended to the highest point with his glass, and made a thorough survey of the sea, as far out as he could behold any object, and then up and down the coast.

"No; he has not drifted out to sea, that is certain," he muttered, and he returned to his boat, got out his stores, and building a fire prepared for himself a very tempting breakfast for a hungry man.

"Now to search the bay thoroughly, for the boat has evidently been lodged upon some island."

Getting into his boat he set sail, and a short while after, while cruising along, uttered a cry of joy.

There, half a mile distant, he discovered a boat adrift.

Quickly he headed toward it, and in a short while was near enough to recognize the boat in which Doctor Rowland had been placed in irons and then left to his fate.

The boat was now drifting through a narrow channel, and Bronx was unable to come up with it, so let it take its course to open water.

He drew near, however, and sailing with a slack sheet kept within a few lengths, while several times he hailed loudly.

No answer came to his hail, and standing upon the seat of his sailboat he tried to see over the high gunwale of the yawl, but this it was impossible to do.

At last the boat passed through the channel, and being in open water Bronx ran close up to it.

To his horror he saw that it was empty!

"Great Heavens! in his despair and misery he has managed to throw himself into the sea, and all my work has been for nothing."

"Curses on my ill-luck! for had I been able to rescue him a right goodly sum would he have given me, besides laying a foundation for future work from him that would have paid me handsomely."

"But he has thrown himself overboard and thus thwarted me, and I have but to return to the town and see what else will turn up to my advantage."

"Well, here goes for port, and I am out the hire of this boat; but venture nothing, gain nothing, and besides, I have not made a bad thing out of the expedition by any means."

So saying Bronx headed once more for Portland, deeply chagrined that his intention to rescue Doctor Rowland, for gold alone, had been frustrated so completely.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ISLAND NELL MAKES A DISCOVERY.

AFTER the interview which Island Nell had with Ruth Rowland she seemed to be full of thought, so much so that her grandfather said to her:

"I hope, Nell, your seeing Miss Rowland has not made your life here tiresome to you?"

"No, indeed, grandpa; but it has taught me not to blame Nick for loving her, for is she not beautiful?"

"She is, indeed, child, and as lovely in character, I'll warrant, as she is in face."

Nell went about her daily duties, in the same way as before Ruth's visit, still it could be seen that she seemed far more thoughtful.

She put Poll on a perch where he could command a fine view of the waters about the island, and said to him:

"Now, Poll, don't you let any sail escape you, for we are expecting visitors, and you have to be the lookout all day and the dogs by night."

"All right," shrieked Poll, and he seemed to be proud of his importance.

Thus the day passed away and no sail came in sight.

During the night the boom of heavy guns in the distance was heard, and the dogs set up their note of alarm.

But realizing how far off the firing was Nell quieted them and again went to sleep.

In the morning early she was up, but no sail was in sight, and Poll was placed on his same perch of observation.

During the afternoon, as the shadows began to lengthen, Poll suddenly shrieked out:

"Boat ahoy! strange boat! Ho, that boat! ahoy!"

Nell was lying in her hammock, idly swinging to and fro, and instantly sprung to her feet, seized her glass and ran to the bluff where Poll was.

There, half a mile distant she beheld a small yawl adrift upon the waters.

No one was visible in it, and it was on a course that would take it away from the island, it being then about as near as it would be brought by the tide.

Running to the basin Nell sprung into her skiff, seized her oars and went swiftly out through the pass in the reef.

Then, half-circling the island she headed for the boat, now being borne away from her by the tide.

A rapid pull and she ran alongside, when, to her amazement, she discovered that it held an occupant.

That occupant, to her horror, she saw was ironed hand and foot, and lay in the bottom of the boat like one dead.

Instantly she called to him, fearing that life had indeed left him.

He started, opened his eyes wearily, and she was face to face with Doctor Rowland.

"Hal do I again owe my life to you, girl?" he said feebly, almost repeating the words he had addressed to Nick Burton.

"Yes, and I am glad to serve you, for your sweet daughter's sake, and because you seem really ill and suffering," said Island Nell in a kindly tone.

"I am ill and suffering, and so cramped I can hardly move.

"The waves have dashed me about, these chains have cut into my flesh, and the hot sun has beat down pitilessly into my face, so I beg you to hasten and give me water."

"I will help you into my skiff, for to tow your large yawl against this strong tide would take a long time."

With an effort the man raised himself, when aided by Nell, and managed to get into the skiff.

Then the yawl was allowed to go adrift once more, and seizing her oars, Nell pulled a strong and rapid stroke for home.

She passed through the break in the reef, and reaching the shore of the little basin, found her grandfather there to meet her.

Both men started as their eyes met, but neither uttered a word, while Nell said:

"Grandpa, this is Doctor Rowland, and I found him ironed as you see, and left in an open boat to drift out to sea and die, so I brought him here."

"You did right, my child, but we have met before, sir," said Old Neptune, turning his gaze upon Doctor Rowland.

"We have, sir."

"You remember me, then?"

"I do."

"And I remember you, sir, but what name said you was yours now?"

"Rupert Rowland," answered the doctor in a low tone.

"Ah! yes, *Rupert Rowland*; a doctor, too?"

"Yes."

"I remember you had great skill as a surgeon long years ago when I knew you."

"Well, well! what strange things happen in this world, Doctor Rupert Rowland, and strangest of all is that we should meet again."

"But come, I am not sorry of it, and I will do all I can to relieve your suffering."

"Let me help you up to my cabin, for these irons are heavy appendages to walk with."

Doctor Rowland made no reply, but with the aid of Old Neptune and Nell, managed to make his way slowly up to the cabin.

Then Old Neptune brought out from an old chest a bunch of rusty keys, and soon fitted one to the locks of the manacles and freed the doctor of the irons, while Nell brought him some water to quench his thirst.

Stretching himself and rubbing his benumbed limbs for a while, he soon felt much better, and was able to join Nell and her father at the really tempting supper which the young girl had prepared.

Shortly after the meal was over, as darkness had come on and the doctor seemed to be very weary, Old Neptune, who had not again alluded to the past, showed him a cot in his room where he was to sleep, and the tired man gladly availed himself of the opportunity to seek repose, while Island Nell and her grandfather sat in their easy-chairs outside, the old man smoking in silence, and the girl playing upon a Spanish guitar, occasionally breaking forth in the words of some sweet, sad love song, and singing in a

rich contralto voice that was full of pathos and music.

At last, laying aside her guitar, Nell said in a low tone:

"Grandpa, so you know Doctor Rowland?"

"Yes, my child."

"You met him years ago?"

"Yes."

"Before I was born, it must have been, for I never remember you to have had any friends, since I could recollect."

"Yes, I knew him before you were born, child."

"Was he a sailor then, for I knew that you were, as you have told me so?"

"Yes, he was a sailor then."

"How strange; but won't you tell me about it?"

"About what, my child?"

"About your knowing Doctor Rowland so long ago."

"There is nothing that I can tell you, Nell, more than that we sailed together in the same vessel for a year or more."

"A war-vessel?"

"Yes, it was a vessel of-war; but I am tired and will go to sleep, and you had best go to your room, for in the morning you must take Doctor Rowland up to Portland, Old Neptune and Doctor Rowland stood upon the shore talking earnestly together, but in subdued tones, as though they did not wish aught that they said to reach the maiden's ears."

"There is something both grandpa and that doctor wish to hide in the past, I am certain."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE RETURN TO ROWLAND MANOR.

THE next morning Island Nell had her little yacht in readiness soon after breakfast, and, while she was getting all ship-shape on board for her run up to Portland, Old Neptune and Doctor Rowland stood upon the shore talking earnestly together, but in subdued tones, as though they did not wish aught that they said to reach the maiden's ears.

As the Scud—with the daring girl at the tiller, and Doctor Rowland seated near watching her with deep interest—swept out into open water, Poll the parrot shrieked a good-by, and then kept it up until they were out of hearing of his shrill voice.

"You live a quiet life there, Nell?" said the doctor by way of opening the conversation.

"Yes, but not an unhappy one, though that grandpa is failing often gives me pain."

"You think that he will not last very long then?"

"He cannot; for he has broken greatly the past year."

"He must be an old man now?"

"He is over seventy."

"Your father's father was he not?"

"Yes."

"Your father I suppose you do not remember?"

"Yes, I remember him, but not my mother."

"How old are you, Nell?"

"Grandpa says I am just eighteen."

"Where were you born?"

"At sea."

"Was your father an officer of the American sea service?"

"I do not know; he was an Englishman and my mother was an American, so grandpa says."

"And you have lived with your grandfather since your father's death?"

"Yes, my father was severely wounded in some action, and my grandfather brought him to an island in this bay, but not the one we now live on, and there he died, and that is all I know."

"And are you not tired of the life you lead?"

"Not now."

"But you would like to receive an education?"

"Grandpa has taught me, and he says I have a better education now than half the young ladies who go to fashionable schools."

"I have books to read, and I know what the world is from them."

"And you have not sighed for a different life?"

"I would not wish to leave grandpa, and yet, I once hoped I would be able to live among my fellow-beings."

"But that was when I loved Nick Burton, and hoped to be happy with him, as I read lovers are in books."

"Poor child! your life-dream was broken very soon; but you loved unworthily."

"I did not, for Nick Burton is as noble as any man who lives."

"You think so?"

"I know so, for I know that he has had offers from pirates, if he would aid them, and from smugglers, too, that would have made him a richer man than you are, and he has refused them with contempt, for he has honor."

"You know this?"

"I do."

"How do you know it?"

"Because I have had the same offers made me."

"Why, were I willing to act as pilot for Casco Bay for smugglers and pirates, I could soon get my weight in gold."

"And you are not?"

"Certainly I am not willing to break the laws of my land, and to gain riches off of others' gold," was the indignant reply.

"And you think that Nick Burton is like you?"

"I know it."

"And yet he is now upon the deck, as chief, of the craft known as the Smuggler of Casco Bay."

"Who says that he is?"

"I do."

"It is false."

"I not only saw him, but twice has he captured me, and twice released me."

"And yet you are determined to capture him?"

"He should be punished for his crime."

"You refer to his having shot that officer?"

"Yes."

"I do not believe that he did shoot him, or if he did, it was done in self-defense, and was not, as you would have me believe, a murder."

"The man's confession when dying, should settle that point."

"He was Nick's foe, and he tried to hurt him with his dying breath."

"You are as foolish as—"

"Who?"

"My daughter, for she believes Burton innocent."

"I honor her for it, and I tell you, Doctor Rowland, there was some plot against Nick Burton, as I know."

"What do you know?" he asked, eagerly.

"I know that a man came alone in a boat to our island, and attempted to cross the reef, and I had to save his life."

"He pretended to be an officer of the Government, and was on the hunt for proof against Nick Burton being a pirate."

"I pretended to hate Nick, and so led him on, and put a spy on his movements to see just what he was."

"No one knew him, and the man shipped on board the Barkaway as a sailor, and now he is not there, and I feel confident that there is a plot against Nick, from some reason, and I intend to ferret it out."

"You?"

"Yes, for I can do it, if I set to work at it," was the determined reply.

"Why, who could plot against Burton, and for what reason?"

"You could plot against him for one, and your reason would be that you did not wish your daughter to marry a poor sailor," was the pat response.

"You misjudge me."

"I may, but I do not think that I do."

"I confess I would rather not have my daughter marry one upon whom suspicion of piracy has fallen."

"Oh, I do not mind that, for you thought grandpa and I were pirates, or the receivers of stolen property, and we are not; and there are men now living in Portland, if the truth was known of them, who are little better than thieves, for their money came through robbery, and they are but *gentlemen pirates*," and Island Nell spoke with the utmost scorn in voice and look.

"You would not suspect me of being a gentleman pirate?" said Doctor Rowland, with a smile.

"I might, for you are an utter stranger in Portland, not one person seeming to know where you came from."

"You have a vast fortune, and it might have been gained by piracy, for you are certainly a most mysterious man, and who knows but that you are a *gentleman pirate*?"

The face of Doctor Rowland darkened with anger, but he made no reply and the subject was not referred to again.

At length the Scud ran alongside the pier of the Rowland Manor, and the doctor sprung out and was about to say farewell without asking Island Nell to land, when out of the little arbor came Ruth and Vivian, and the former called out:

"Come, Nell, you do not intend to run away and not see me, especially after having rescued my father from some dire calamity, as I am sure you have by your bringing him back in your yacht, when he went away in a well equipped and manned vessel."

There was a touch of satire in Ruth's tone, and her father's brow grew black as a thunder-cloud, for he evidently had not intended that Nell should land at Rowland Manor.

CHAPTER XL.

ISLAND NELL MAKES A RESOLVE.

THAT the expedition, which he had meant to keep secret from Ruth, was known to her, was a cause of deep chagrin to Doctor Rowland.

Seeing her and Vivian coming to greet him, just when he believed they were in Boston, and had hoped to get Island Nell away without her being seen, was another cause of anger on the part of the doctor.

But policy taught him to hide his feelings, so

he stepped forward, greeted Ruth affectionately, shook Vivian warmly by the hand, and said with forced pleasantry:

"You are back then from Boston, I am glad to see!"

"Well, I would not have been here now but for this young lady, for I received orders from the Government to search the islands of Casco Bay for smugglers and—"

"Why, father, are you in the service of the Government?" asked Ruth.

"Temporarily, my child. But, as I was saying, I chartered a small craft and enlisted a crew that I knew nothing about, and we were chased by a pirate; and because I insisted upon holding on in spite of his fire, my men mutinied, put me in irons and set me adrift in an open boat, and but for this sweet girl, who came to my rescue, I would have lost my life."

"As it was, when she found me I was half-dead; but she carried me to her island home and cared for me kindly, and has just brought me home, so that I insist upon claiming her as our guest."

"Yes, Nell, you must not run away, for I wish to have a talk with you," said Ruth.

"But my grandfather is all alone."

"But you cannot get back anyhow before morning, with this breeze, and in fact it is almost a calm, so remain to night with me and take an early start," urged Ruth.

Nell hesitated, for she wished to first visit the town, having made up her mind to ferret out some little mysteries by setting one whom she knew upon the track, so she said:

"I have some things to get for home, and, if you will permit me to first run up to the town, I will return by night and remain awhile."

Ruth saw that she meant it, and so allowed her to go, and Nell was soon sailing slowly up the harbor to the town.

Landing at a dock, whose owner she knew, and who was none other than Mynheer Stoll, she held a long and seemingly satisfactory conversation with that worthy, and then, having made a few necessary purchases, she took them to the Scud and started back to Rowland Manor.

The wind had almost wholly died away, and it was dark when she ran up to the little pier; but Ruth was there to meet her, and gave her a warm welcome.

"See, you would have been becalmed to-night alone upon the waters, so you have done right to remain, outside of the pleasure your visit gives me," said Ruth.

"No, this calm will last only a short while, and then a storm will follow—Hark!"

"That is a distant gun," said Ruth, as a rumbling sound reached her ears.

"No, it is thunder, and a storm is coming up."

"How well you know, for the skies are perfectly clear."

"I feel it in the air, and I am always studying the signs of the elements."

"This will be a hard blow, so I will anchor the Scud off-shore and make all snug on board, if you do not mind waiting for me."

"No, indeed, and I will go with you."

The two girls now sprang into the little skiff in tow of the Scud, and Island Nell pulled the yacht out to a safe distance and then threw her large anchor overboard.

The sails were then closely furled, a lantern run up to the mast-head and the Scud was ready to meet the gale, which was slowly rising from seaward.

Going up to the mansion with Ruth, the two maidens entered the library, where Doctor Rowland and Vivian Moreland were talking together.

They arose as the two entered, and greeted Nell warmly, while she did not seem in the least abashed at her surroundings.

Supper was soon announced, and the pretty Hermitess did not act in the slightest manner out of the regulation way of polite society of that age, and the three fashionably-bred persons wondered that a girl whom they had looked upon as a half-wild creature could possess such elegant manners.

Island Nell entertained them, in her sweet way, with stories of her recluse life, and all three were perfectly charmed with her *naivete* and beauty.

"Let us go up in the tower, Nell, so that I can show you the view of the town from there by night, for it is very beautiful, and we can see if your prediction about the storm is true," said Ruth.

"Oh, the storm is coming, as I notice the change in the air that precedes it," answered Island Nell, as the two left the doctor and Vivian and ascended to the top of the tower.

The view of the town, with its myriad of lights, the harbor, with the vessels at anchor, and their twinkling lamps, and the vast expanse of land and water visible, though in the darkness, completely charmed Island Nell, and she stood like one entranced with admiration.

"Oh is it not a grand sight?" she said after awhile.

"It is indeed, and I often come here by day and by night to behold the view, and wonder which I like best, the scene under the sunlight or the darkness; but see, there rises your storm," and Ruth pointed seaward, where the

skies were of iaky hue, excepting when broken now and then by lightning flashes.

"Yes, it will break within two hours."

"Will your grandfather not be anxious about you?"

"Oh no, for he knows I can take care of myself, and will run for shelter before the storm strikes."

"What a strange life you lead."

"I know no other; but I am glad that you got back home without discovery, for I feared for you when I heard the heavy firing at night."

"Yes, and I must tell you of our adventure," and Ruth told Nell of their escape from the smuggler, and afterward of their moonlight flight from her father's vessel.

"And you say that Nick Burton was the chief of the smuggler schooner?"

"So said the boatman, Boatswain Knowls."

"He saw him?"

"Yes, and was set free by him."

"This is strange, and I cannot understand it."

"Nor I; but my father has told me of the capture of his vessel by the smuggler, and his release by Nick Burton, so I am compelled to believe that he is really on the outlaw craft, though for what purpose, Heaven only knows, yet I cannot believe him guilty of piracy."

"Nor can I, Ruth; but we shall see, for I intend to find out all."

"But how can you?"

"I hardly know, but I shall know all, for when I set out to do a thing I accomplish it."

"Oh, Nell, what a brave girl you are; but where you know you will at once tell me all?"

"Yes."

"And I will depend upon you, and your word, when I would not another, and if you tell me that Nick Burton has in reality turned pirate, I will cast him out of my heart as I would a serpent."

"And you will trust me, when you know that I love him?"

"Yes."

"Might I not tell you wrong, to have you cast him aside that I might win his love?"

"No, you could not do that, for, if it broke your heart, you would not deceive me."

"I thank you, Ruth."

"I shall find out all that you would know, and you shall be told the whole truth."

"See how rapidly the storm is rising now."

"Yes; let us go and join the others in the library," and the two girls, so strangely met, rivals and yet friends, left the tower and entered the library, where they found Doctor Rowland and Vivian playing chess.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE SECRET OF THE ISLE.

AFTER having captured the schooner of Doctor Rowland, and discovering who it was he held as his prisoner and released him, the young officer, who had so strangely come in command of the smuggler schooner, laid his course for a certain island in Casco Bay.

As he drew near it, he said:

"I will go ashore here alone, Captain Paul, as what I wish to accomplish can be done without the aid of the men."

"As you please, Captain Burton," answered the white-haired smuggler, who stood near him.

"You are certain that this is the island known as Bleak Rock?"

"It is surely Bleak Rock, Captain Burton, for I know it well, though I have never set foot upon it, or ever seen any man that cared to be fore to-night."

"Well, I have a motive in landing there which I cannot now explain."

"Call me when you lay to and have the skiff ready," and the young chief descended to the cabin.

There he took out of his pocket a paper and spread it out upon the table before him.

It was a map of an island, with certain marks and explanatory notes upon it.

"I can find the spot, and I am glad that I got hold of this paper without his knowing that I did so, for I believe that I shall find something of value."

"All ready, sir," cried a voice from the deck, interrupting the young man in his musings, and he thrust the paper again into his pocket, drew on a pair of stout boots and ascended to the deck.

"The skiff is ready, sir."

"All right, so am I; but I forgot to say that I wanted a lantern to take with me."

A seaman brought the lantern and the young officer went over the side into the skiff.

Seizing the oars, he rowed rapidly away, and soon passed over the half-mile from the schooner to the shore.

Circling the island an oar's length from it, he at last found a place where he could make a landing.

This he succeeded in doing, and, drawing his skiff half out of the water, he took up his lantern and picked his way into the interior of the island.

It was a barren spot indeed, and well named, for a mass of boulders arose upon all sides, almost forming a rock-hill in the center, and but

a few trees grew upon it, and these were stunted in growth.

The island was perhaps twenty acres in size, and a more dreary, desolate spot it was hard to imagine.

With great difficulty the smuggler chief picked his way among the rocks, and after considerable toil reached the stone hill in the center of the island.

Here he sat down upon a rock to rest, and drawing out the map from his pocket began to attentively regard it by the light of his lantern.

"Now to find the sugar-loaf shaped rock," he muttered, and this he succeeded in doing after a short search.

To the top of this, with much difficulty he climbed, and discovered it to be hollow.

Lowering the lantern, by tying it to his kerchief, he saw that it was not very deep, so he dropped into it, and found a cavernous-looking opening, some three feet in diameter, running back from the bowl, or cavity in which he stood.

On his hands and knees, pushing the lamp before him, he proceeded about twenty feet, when he came out into a natural rock chamber about ten feet square.

With his lantern he closely examined the sides and saw no break in them, and then in one corner he discovered a large flat rock.

It took his whole strength to turn this over, but he did so after several trials and beneath he found just what he was searching for.

This was a metal box about two feet long, and one foot in width and height.

It had two padlocks upon it, and was rusted by the dampness of the place.

This box he raised from its burial-place, and he found it lighter than he had evidently expected to.

Replacing the rock as he had found it, he put his lantern at the other end of the tunnel and proceeded to drag the box to the opening.

It was only by fastening his kerchief in one of the lock hasps, his silk neck scarf to that, and then attaching his belt that he was able to draw the box up to the summit of the rock after him.

As he did so a red glare illumined the sky, and there sounded the boom of a heavy gun.

Instantly after there came peal after peal of artillery.

"My God! the schooner is attacked and I ashore," cried the young captain, and he turned his gaze seaward.

"There is nothing in these waters that is a match for her, even though she is caught at anchor," he added, as his eyes fell upon the glare of incessant firing, though he could not see the vessels, as a high point of the island intervened.

"I must leave this box and come for it another time," he said, and he hastily lowered it to the bottom of the cavity and releasing his belt seized his lantern and started to regain his boat.

After a rough run of it over the uneven stones he reached his boat, sprang into it, and sent it fairly flying over the waters.

The heavy guns had now ceased, but the firing of small-arms and the clash of steel, mingling with the shouts of a fierce combat greeted his ears.

Straining every nerve he held on, now and then sending a quick glance ahead to be sure that he was going right.

At length he ran alongside of his schooner and clambered on board, just as all sounds of conflict ceased.

As he sprang upon his deck, a cutlass in one hand, a pistol in the other, he suddenly found himself confronted by a score of foes, and he realized that his schooner was taken, for the decks were strewn with his men.

At sight of him those whom he expected to receive him as a foe fell back before him in seeming alarm, and left him standing as still as a statue, gazing upon them in utter amazement.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A RED FOE.

AFTER Captain Burton had left the schooner for the shore, his lieutenant, Captain Paul, stood gazing after him with some interest.

"He told me he might be away for hours, and to drop anchor and give the men a rest."

"I'll do it, and I've half a mind to go in his wake and see just what he is up to."

"He's a strange one, anyhow, and does not fear Satan, while he is as handsome as a woman; but oh! what a grip he has got in that delicate hand of his, and as for cards, he knows 'em same as a deacon does gospel."

"Well, I'll let the mud-hook down, for she's drifting."

So saying, he gave orders to take in sail and let go the anchor, after which only a small watch was set, for in that secluded locality no danger was anticipated.

Returning to the taffrail, he leant over it, his eyes again fixed upon Bleak Rock, while he once more began to muse aloud as before.

"Now I had an idea that the chief would never send any one to take my place, and that I'd be captain; but he has sent some one, and a mere boy at that."

"But it's a boy that can teach me, I admit, so I do not intend to raise a row, especially when

the youth treats me well and the men like him, while he says that it is only for a while that he remains on board.

"It cut me at first to know I had to step down a peg; but then it was the chief's order, and we are all bound to obey him.

"Besides, the young captain has let me have my way right along.

"But what he has gone ashore for on that barren island is the question.

"Ten to one that it is to look up some treasure the chief planted there.

"I wish I had known of it, so that I could have looked it up.

"Well, this life won't last always, and I ought to be laying up a snug sum for a rainy day for old age is coming, and perhaps soon, for I've felt blue of late, and the gallows has more dread for me now than it had some years ago.

"Well, murderer that I started out as from my home, buccaneer that I became, and nominally a smuggler now, but in reality a pirate, I richly deserve hanging if any man does."

With this remark Captain Paul began to pace to and fro, his thoughts seemingly too painful to find vent in words.

How long he was thus buried in gloomy meditations he did not know, but suddenly he was astounded by a red glare and the deep boom of a gun, while a shower of grape went tearing through the schooner, killing two of the five men on deck.

An instant after a large schooner came rushing down upon the smuggler craft, a stern voice in an unknown tongue gave an order, and as she swept up into the wind and glided toward the smaller vessel she poured in shot after shot of grape, that cut down the smugglers as fast as they ran up on deck.

Calling to his men to repel boarders, Captain Paul sprung forward to lead them against their foes; but just then the large schooner came against the smaller one with a shock, and over her bulwarks swarmed half a hundred of dark forms, with yells that fairly chilled the blood of those who heard it.

In vain did Captain Paul strive to stem the red tide that set against him, for he was pressed back with his men to the fore-castle, and upon all sides of him they fell.

"Quarter! quarter! quarter!" at last cried the smugglers, seeing that further conflict was impossible against those who opposed them.

But the cry was unheard, or if heard was unheeded.

The merciless foe still pressed nearer, cutting down men whether their hands were upheld for mercy or were grasping weapons.

"Men, let us die game, for those devils show no mercy.

"A! them, lads, and make them feel our dying blow!" cried Captain Paul, and in a frenzy he led the remnant of his crew against the mass of desperate humanity in their front.

Then followed, for a moment only, a fierce and deadly struggle; but when their captain fell dead the smugglers, a brave half-dozen, turned in despair and fright and sprung into the sea, the waters drowning the terrific yells of their victors.

It was at this instant that the young smuggler captain sprung upon the deck.

No wonder that he seemed dazed by the sight that he beheld.

There lay the white-haired lieutenant, covered with a score of wounds, while from quarter-deck to fore-castle were his brave crew—brave though outlaws they were.

Here and there in their midst was the body of a foe; but those were few and far between, so unexpected had been their coming, so fierce had been their attack, and so irresistible their rush upon the smugglers.

For the young captain to turn and fly looked like certain death, but he showed no desire to do this.

He stood his ground, his pistol ready, and his attitude that of a man beyond the power to move.

The crew who had done the red work fell back at sight of him, but uttered no word.

Suddenly out of the mass came a tall form. It was Keno, the Kennebec chief.

His cutlass was red, as could be seen by the light of the battle-lanterns, his naked body and face were painted and smoke-stained, and his look that of one who had just been reveling with delight in a carnival of death.

"What does my white brother here?"

"Are his people behind him?" asked the chief, in his deep tones.

But the young captain uttered no word in reply, and the Kennebec chief said again:

"Does my white brother come as my friend, as he has ever been in the past, or does he come as my foe, with his sea braves at his back?"

The face of the smuggler captain lighted up quickly, and extending his hand he said:

"I am not your foe, chief, and yet these are my people cut down by your band."

"What! does the pale-face speak true?"

"Are these dead men his sea braves?"

"They were."

"I believed that they were outlaws, the enemies of my people, and of your people; I knew

not that this was your vessel, or I would have cut off my hand ere I struck a blow against them," and the Indian chief seemed deeply moved.

"Chief, circumstances I care not to speak of drove me from among my people, and I took refuge here, on this deck, with outlaws, for this vessel was a smuggler craft.

"I became their captain, and only a short while since I went ashore on yonder island, alone, and when I heard the roar of conflict I returned with all haste.

"See what I find! my men all slain, my vessel in the hands of a foe."

"No, no, not a foe, but your friend!"

"See! there is my vessel, here are my sea braves, and all are yours to command.

"I sought you once and asked you to be our leader, and now I ask you again.

"Come with us, and be our chief, for my braves love you as a brother, and well you know that Keno the Kennebec is your friend through all.

"Let my white brother speak!"

The Kennebec chief folded his arms upon his broad breast and awaited the reply of the young smuggler captain.

After an instant of silence the answer came:

"Kennebec, you have massacred my crew, and my vessel is in your hands.

"I have no home, and I will accept your offer and become your leader."

A wild yell from the throats of the half a hundred painted braves told of their joy at this decision that made one, whom they had ever regarded as a brother, their white chief.

CHAPTER XLIII.

AN ENEMY IN PORT.

It was the night of the gathering storm, which Ruth and Island Nell had watched from the top of the tower.

The party of four, Doctor Rowland, Vivian, Ruth and Island Nell sat in the large and handsomely-furnished library, the two former engaged in a game of chess, the two latter talking together confidentially, seated side by side upon a little sofa in one corner of the room.

"Do you sing, Nell?" asked Ruth, presently, breaking a silence that had fallen between them.

"Yes, sometimes, for my own amusement, and grandpa's, I play and sing," she answered innocently.

"On what instrument do you play?" asked Ruth.

"I suppose you will think me little of a lady, when I tell you that I like the violin, and really play it best of any instrument."

"Indeed! how strange to hear of a young girl playing the violin; but sometime I must hear you play, for you shall not be the recluse that you have been, and I expect to see much of you in future.

"But what else do you play on?"

"The harp and the guitar."

"Ah, indeed! I have both instruments here, for I am partial to both, and you must favor me."

"Come, let us go into the parlor."

They arose and left the library, neither the doctor or Vivian seeming to observe their departure, so deep were they in their game of chess.

Presently the two started, for, following the low thrumming of a harp, was heard a voice, rich, full of pathos, and so musical, so sweet, that the game of chess was forgotten and both Doctor Rowland and Vivian sat entranced while they listened.

It was a Spanish love-song that Island Nell sung and its beauty touched their hearts.

Entering the parlor, accompanied by Vivian, Doctor Rowland requested the sweet singer to again raise her voice in song, and once more the rich notes filled the mansion, until suddenly there pealed forth a terrific crash that caused the mansion to fairly rock, and a cry of terror to break from the lips of Vivian.

"The storm is upon us at last," cried Ruth.

"No, that was not a peal of thunder, but the boom of a heavy gun," said Island Nell, springing to the window that overlooked the harbor.

"You are right! that was a gun, and a heavy one."

"What can it mean?" and the doctor also sought the window.

"Ah! there breaks the storm," cried Island Nell, as a vivid glare lit up the heavens and earth and a terrific crash of thunder followed.

"Yes, and there is another shot—ha! it is from a vessel running out of the harbor—see!"

The lightning was most vivid, and from almost the dead calm of a few moments before, the elements now burst forth with wild fury, and the wind bent the trees like bows, snapping many of them in twain, and tearing large branches off and hurling them along like switches.

The mansion fairly rocked, and while the thunder pealed forth incessantly mingling with it was the heavy roar of artillery.

With the harbor more brilliant than day, under the lurid glare of the lightning, a thrilling scene presented itself.

The waters were crowded with shipping at

anchor; but two vessels were in motion, and a third was rapidly setting what sail it dared display in that furious blow.

The two vessels in motion were schooners, one of them a small-manned craft under jib and mainsail, the latter reefed down.

This craft was leading, and upon her decks were a dozen swarthy forms that looked like demons in the weird, lurid light.

She was driving along at a tremendous pace, and heading out of the harbor, while close in her wake came the second of the two vessels referred to, a large, armed schooner, with a crowd of the same wild-looking beings upon her deck.

It was this vessel that was firing, and her crew were seen at the guns, those upon the starboard side being turned upon the Barkaway, which, still at anchor, was hastily getting ready for a chase and a conflict.

The Barkaway was also firing upon the two vessels flying seaward, and it was evidently the intention of her commander to follow in their wake, lead them where they might.

Such was the startling scene that met the eyes of those who gazed from the open window of Rowland Mansion.

"It is the Indian Pirate!" cried Island Nell, recognizing the larger of the schooners.

"It is surely, and she has cut out that small schooner leading her, and is driving her out to sea."

"See! Indians are the crews of both," answered the doctor.

"And the Barkaway is setting sail and getting up anchor to go in chase."

"See how fiercely they fire at each other," cried Ruth.

"Behold! the man standing by the helmsman of the Indian Pirate is Nick Burton," almost shouted Doctor Rowland, and his voice seemed to fairly ring with delight as he held forth his glass to his daughter to look through.

She seized the glass with trembling hands, gave one look through it and cried:

"God have mercy upon him! it is Nick Burton."

With a moan of anguish she sunk down upon a sofa, while Island Nell snatched the glass from her hands, turned it upon the form that had attracted the attention of Doctor Rowland and gave one long look.

Then, placing the glass in the hands of Doctor Rowland she quietly slipped from the room wholly unobserved.

While poor Ruth sat, almost unable to move, her eyes bent upon the floor, her hands clasped before her dejectedly, her father and Vivian continued to gaze out upon the thrilling scene before them.

The storm was now at its height, and the two schooners were flying along at race-horse speed and nearly opposite to the mansion, the guns of the Indian Pirate keeping up a steady fire upon the Barkaway.

Upon the deck, near the helmsman, stood the tall form which Doctor Rowland and Ruth had recognized as Nick Burton.

His arms were folded upon his broad breast, and he seemed to be regarding the Rowland Mansion, wholly unmindful of the hot fire which the schooner-of-war Barkaway was pouring upon his vessel.

Near him was Keno the Kennebec chief, and he was watching the effect of his fire upon the Barkaway, and seemingly regardless of her shots at him.

As the Barkaway got clear of her anchorage and swung round to the wind, the single white man amid the Indian crew suddenly unfolded his arms, one hand pointed toward the vessel of war and he seemed to issue some order.

Instantly the Indian Pirate schooner luffed sharp and her broadside was poured upon the Barkaway.

The effect was disastrous to the vessel-of-war, for her bowsprit was cut away, her foretopmast was sent plunging to the deck, and she fairly reeled under the shock and was thrown at once out of the fight.

As though realizing that she had nothing more to dread from the Barkaway, the Indian Pirate ceased firing, and receiving the hot fire of the fort swept out to sea.

"See there!" suddenly cried Ruth, again springing to the window.

"By the Lord Harry! it is that girl's yacht—ha! and she is in it," cried Doctor Rowland, as a lightning flash, more vivid than usual revealed the Scud standing away from the pier, her jib and mainsail reefed down, and standing at the tiller none other than Island Nell.

"Oh, what does all this mean?" moaned Ruth, and her eyes became fixed upon the flying schooners, and the little Scud in their wake, until they vanished from sight in the darkness, while the storm, having swept over the town and harbor, left behind it a scene of ruin and gloom.

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO SCHOONERS.

If the entire annihilation of the crew of his smuggler vessel, was a deep surprise to its young captain, it seemed not so to be to the Indians who were the perpetrators of the act.

They knew that at last they had met a part of those who had been the ones to visit their village with sword and fire, and they struck in return a revengeful blow, causing those innocent of the deed to suffer alike with those who were guilty.

Keno the Kennebec had overreached himself in one particular.

He had believed, and hoped, that he would find his missing daughter upon that vessel.

Certain rumors had come to him that led him to know that the Smugglers of the Casco were among those who had destroyed his village, and he therefore looked upon them as the kidnappers of his child.

The Wild Flower was one of the most beautiful Indian girls ever seen in the red-skin tribes, and she had been the idol of her father's heart, the queen of her people, though she was yet very young.

To have her torn from him as she had been; to feel that she still lived, was indeed a death-blow to his happiness, and in his desire to find her his warriors were as determined as he was himself.

But, having massacred the crew of the smuggler craft he had locked up the lips that could tell him of his child.

Then it was that he found the one pale-face on the smuggler, and acting as captain, whom he really loved.

They had met only a few times it was true, but the young captain had always befriended him and his tribe, and he was revered by every warrior of the land.

Had it been other than he, who had boarded the schooner at the moment the fierce slaughter had ended, he would have died then and there.

But Nick Burton was safe among that red-skin crew, though he was found as chief of the smugglers.

Leaving his braves to look after the dead, Keno, the Kennebec, led the young sailor into his cabin and said reproachfully:

"I went to see my white brother, and asked him to become the white captain of my braves; but he refused, for he said that he was a chief among the pale-faces, and yet I find him the leader of an outlaw band that were the slayers of my people."

"True, but when the Kennebec saw me I was not then what I now am, a fugitive from justice, and I had to seek safety in flight."

"Had I known where to find my red-skin brother I would have sought him."

"It is well, for you are now with me; but can you tell me of my Wild Flower?"

"Nothing."

"She was not on board the schooner?"

"No."

"Where is she?"

"Heaven only knows."

"You heard not of her?"

"No."

"Where is the retreat of the Casco Smugglers?"

"Does my red brother know the Island of Eagles in Penobscot Bay?"

"I know the island."

"That is the retreat of the smugglers, for there they keep a smaller schooner, with a crew of seven men, and on board is the more valuable booty and the prisoners awaiting ransom."

"Ah, yes, they call it the Prison Ship."

"True."

"And is not my daughter there?"

"That I cannot tell you, for I have never been to the retreat, the schooner you captured to-night having been cruising in near waters to Portland."

"Will the white chief go with me to the Island of Eagles?"

"Certainly, but—"

"My brother has something to say."

"Yes, I would say that having gone to the Eagle Island with you, I would then return to the waters adjacent to the town of Portland, as I have work to do here."

"It shall be as my white brother desires," was the answer, and the two went on deck.

The smuggler schooner was at once put under a prize crew of twenty red-skins, and the young captain went on board and took command.

Then the two vessels set sail for Penobscot Bay.

It was now broad daylight, and the smuggler schooner keeping closer inshore than the Indian Pirate, the two kept abreast of each other in a very pretty race, neither seeming to gain any advantage.

As they arrived off the mouth of the Kennebec Captain Burton suddenly sighted a small smack making all haste toward Bald Head.

Instantly he gave chase, signaling to the Indian Pirate to follow.

The little smack suddenly changed its course and headed directly for the smuggler, but catching sight of the Indian Pirate once more turned in flight.

A shot over her deck did not check her, and a second and third were fired with such precision that she quickly luffed up into the wind.

Running down close to her Captain Burton sprang into a boat and rowed aboard.

There were but two men on the little craft, and these at once recognized the young captain,

as he did them for several days before they had been sent away to the retreat from the smuggler schooner, bearing a message to the officer in charge there.

"Oh captain, but you gave us a fight, sir," said one of the men.

"How so?" asked Captain Burton.

"We saw the schooner and then caught sight of t'other one, and thought you were captured."

"We have been, but it is all right for you, as I will protect you, my lads; but what news have you of the retreat?"

"All is gone there, cap'n."

"Gone! what do you mean?"

"Well, sir, we ran in fortunately at night, and we found a government cutter there, and it captured the schooner, the booty, prisoners and all, for somebody proved traitor and piloted her in."

"A prize crew was put on board the schooner and she is now on her way to Portland, keeping well off-shore."

"When did she start?"

"This morning at daybreak, sir, we saw her far out at sea."

"How many men are on board of her?"

"Only eight or ten, sir, as the Government cutter seemed short-handed, and went off down the coast."

The Indian Pirate had now come up, and Captain Burton made known what the two smugglers had told him.

"And the prisoners are on the schooner?" asked Keno, the Kennebec, earnestly.

"Yes, chief," answered the man, with a wholesome awe of the Indian, for he had learned how the crew of the smuggler schooner had been slain.

"Will my brother go with me to take that vessel; for my child is there?" asked the chief.

"Yes, but you had better put a small crew on board this schooner, and send her to a secret hiding-place to await our return."

"Can my brother trust his two braves?"

"Yes, chief."

"Are they good sea braves?"

"Yes, for one of them was an under officer on this schooner."

"Then I will let them have six of my warriors, and take the schooner to the island where we buried our guns when we were at peace."

"One of my warriors can pilot them there."

So it was arranged, and the two white seamen went on board the smuggler schooner, with six Indian warriors, their little smack was taken in tow, and the Indian Pirate, with Captain Burton as commander, headed seaward in chase of the Prison Ship.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE PRISON SHIP.

It was several hours before the schooner, known as the Prison Ship, was sighted from the decks of the Indian Pirate.

Then she was seen to be on a course straight for Portland harbor, and the Indian Pirate squared away in chase, though on a course which would give those on the Prison Ship the idea that she was not trying to head them off.

From the peak of the pirate the American flag was flying, and the same colors were over the deck of the chase.

The latter was a small schooner, and sailed well.

It had been the smugglers' crack vessel until Captain Paul had secured the schooner, on whose decks he had perished with his crew at the hands of the red-skin sailors.

As the two vessels drew near the harbor of Portland night was approaching, and a storm was also rolling up from seaward, so that both seemed most anxious to gain port as soon as possible.

The Prison Ship had seemed to come to consider the Indian Pirate as a Government vessel-of-war, for she held severely on her course, and Captain Burton was anxious that she should not suspect their real character.

Seeing, however, that the Prison Ship would run into port nearly a league ahead of him, he turned to Keno the Kennebec and said:

"As we have shown no sign of hostility, they will not suspect us, so suppose we follow her into port, cut her out and escape to sea with her?"

"My brother knows best."

"This storm will break about the time we reach the upper harbor, and that will prevent our being noticed."

"Yes."

"She will drop anchor, perhaps, near the schooner-of-war Barkaway, and we can run in, as though to anchor near, throw a crew of twenty braves on board, who will get up anchor, set sail and head seaward, while we remain in her wake to fight off the cruiser, should she attack us, which she doubtless will."

"My brother speaks well."

"The crew of the Prison Ship can be seized and thrown below, and we can run with both vessels to the island where you met the smuggler schooner."

"The Kennebec is willing."

"Do as you think best," was the laconic reply of the Indian chief.

Thus the two schooners held on toward port,

the darkness gathering around them, and the storm rushing down from seaward with a sullen roar that betokened mischief.

Ere long the lights of the town came in view, to those on the deck of the Indian Pirate, but the Prison Ship had already disappeared from view.

Straight into port headed the Indian Pirate, sweeping by vessels that were hastily making all ship-shape to meet the storm, and with every eye on the lookout for the Prison Ship.

Past the Barkaway she sped, and on up the harbor to where the chase was sighted, snugly lying at anchor, while a small boat was discovered running with all speed toward the Barkaway.

"It is the Prize Officer going to report his arrival to the commander of the schooner-of-war; but he will report having what he has not got," said Captain Burton with a smile, addressing Keno the Kennebec who stood by his side.

The Indian Pilot made no reply.

His eyes were fixed upon the Prison Ship with a stare.

Did that vessel hold his darling Wild Flower, from whom he had been parted so long, and the last of his kindred?

A few moments more and he would know.

The Indian Pirate swept by the anchored Prison Ship, upon whose decks were seen only three or four men, put about, as though on a pivot, and glided alongside the prize, so near that a dozen nimble forms sprang upon her decks.

Without a struggle almost, without a shot the Prison Ship was seized, and instantly the few men on deck were thrust below and the hatches were closed over them.

Then the anchor was dragged rapidly up, the sails unfurled and set, reefed down, and the Prison Ship started down the harbor, with the Indian Pirate in her wake, her sails also having been close-reefed.

But vessels near had discovered that there was something wrong, and distress and alarm signals were sent up, which quickly brought the crew of the Barkaway into busy action, and the lightning revealing the daring captain of the Prison Ship, a heavy gun opened upon the Indian Pirate.

This was the deep boom which had startled those in the parlor of the Rowland Manor.

At the same moment almost the storm broke in all its fury, and a very pandemonium seemed to rage in the harbor and town, for the tempest blew vessels loose from their anchorage, and sent them crashing together and some ashore, the winds howled like muffled thunder, and blew away steeples, roofs and trees, the thunder came in awful peals, the lightnings glared and made the wild scene as lurid as day, while the booming of heavy guns from the Barkaway, Indian Pirate and forts, added to the uproar and terrible confusion.

But on board the Indian Pirate all were calm, and although the guns were firing continually, and the red crew were receiving the fire of the forts and the Barkaway, the schooner held on her way close in the wake of the captured Prison Ship until the danger from man was left behind, and the elements were alone left to battle with.

"Will the chief take the helm and head for the secret island?" asked Captain Burton, when the schooners were at sea, bounding through the waters.

"My white brother knows well the trail over the waters."

"Yes, but I would rather that you, chief, would be the pilot."

Keno the Kennebec made no reply, but stepped to the helm, the Prison Ship was signaled to drop astern and follow, and the two vessels headed for the island rendezvous of the red sea warriors.

It was after dawn when they ran into the little inlet, where the reader remembers to have seen the Indian Pirate fitted out with her guns, which had been hidden away upon the island.

The storm had nearly blown itself out, but here both schooners lay in quiet waters.

Impatient at the delay, Keno the Kennebec sprang into his boat, and accompanied by Captain Burton, rowed out to where the Prison Ship had been anchored, for it had not been hauled along shore, as had the Indian Pirate schooner.

The red crew on board had not yet opened the hatches, so knew not who or what was below, for the cabin companionway had also been closed.

Opening the latter, Keno the Kennebec sprang hastily down into the cabin, followed by Captain Burton.

There were captives there, men, women and children, all anxious-looking and pale-faced.

There were nearly a score—unfortunates captured in various ways by the smugglers and awaiting ransom.

They gazed in amazement upon the intruders, and the women and children shrieked with fear.

But Captain Burton quickly said:

"Be not alarmed, my friends, for your lives are not in danger, as you shall discover ere long."

"We search here for the daughter of this chief, Keno the Kennebec."

The Indian Pirate stood like a statue awaiting the reply that would bring to him joy or sorrow.

It soon came, and it brought sorrow to his heart, for the young Indian maiden was not on board.

The crew were then brought on deck and questioned; but they had not seen an Indian girl among the captives, and had heard of none, since their vessel had captured the Prison Ship.

With a face stern and full of anguish, the Kennebec chief turned away, and Captain Burton quickly followed him, for he saw that he was in a mood to vent his despair upon the prisoners, for his eyes were flashing with a desire for revenge, and he cared not who suffered so that they were pale-faces.

CHAPTER XLVI.

AN UNEXPECTED MEETING.

It was no easy matter for Nick Burton to quiet the revengeful feelings of Keno the Kennebec, after his disappointment in not finding his daughter.

But the Indian was at last convinced that it was wrong to hold revenge against the innocent, and consented to go on a cruise again in search of his child.

Upon this cruise Captain Burton told him that he would not go, but remain at the island to look after the prisoners and the two vessels, the smuggler schooner and the Prison Ship.

At the same time he would take the guns found in the hold of the Prison Ship and, after arming her with several that were suitable to her tonnage, he would place the others in a fort which he would erect upon the island, and that the place should become the fortified retreat of the Indian Pirates.

This idea seemed to please the Kennebec, and leaving half a score of his braves with the young captain as a guard, he set sail in his schooner, still on the search for his daughter, for his restless nature would not allow him to remain long at anchor.

As soon as he was gone, Captain Burton called to him the two white men who had formerly belonged to the smuggler schooner, and who, it will be remembered, had brought that craft to the island.

"Mason," he said, addressing the one who had been an under officer on the smuggler schooner, "I wish you to take command here, for I am going away and may not return, perhaps, until to-morrow night."

"Watch these red-skins closely, and if they attempt any underhand work toward the prisoners, be ready to thwart them, if you have to release and arm the captives."

"I do not believe that the red-skins will be treacherous, but I warn you, in case they should."

"There are ten of them, and the eight male captives and yourselves make ten, while the women, in a struggle for life, can prove dangerous, and the Indians, surprised, where they meant to surprise, would be defeated."

"I will speak to the captives about it, have them freed of their irons and armed, but you keep them below decks until you see the red-skins mean treachery and then act."

"If all goes well, then so much the better, but be on your guard, though, as I told you, I may be wrong in suspecting the Kennebecs."

"I shall return as soon as possible, but it is necessary that I go to-night, and I may be gone two days, though I hope not."

That night Captain Burton departed alone in the little smack in which had been Mason and his shipmate when picked up by the smuggler, in their flight after the capture of the Eagle Island.

It was a light craft, readily managed by one man, and though the waters were still rough after the storm, it went bowling briskly along.

A sail of five hours brought him to Bleak Rock, and running in close he dropped anchor until dawn.

Going into the little cabin he sought rest, and the sun was shining brightly when he awoke.

Getting up anchor he ran inshore, and building a fire cooked his breakfast.

Then he started for the interior of the island, to regain the iron box which he had been forced to leave the night of the Indian pirate's fatal attack upon the smuggler schooner.

Hardly had he disappeared in the interior of the island when a small craft rounded the point of an island not far distant, and headed directly for the spot where the little smack lay, anchored fore and aft within a few feet of the shore.

A glance was sufficient to show that it was the Scud, and that Island Nell sat at the tiller.

She held her glass in her hand and had accidentally recognized the occupant of the boat.

Running close inshore she allowed her yacht to drift alongside of the smack and then made them fast.

Leaping ashore, from the deck of the smack she started into the interior of the island, but suddenly stepped behind a rock, as she beheld the object of her search approaching.

He carried the iron box upon his shoulder, his

eyes were bent downward, picking out his steps over the rough way he was walking, and he did not see, or dream of one being near.

"Nick Burton!"

He started and dashed the iron box to his feet.

Instantly Island Nell stepped out and confronted him.

"Ha! sweet Nell, we meet again, I am glad to say; but you nearly startled me to death," and he held forth his hand.

She did not take it, but said:

"Yes, we meet again, for I have followed you."

"I saw you on the deck of the Indian Pirate two nights ago, when you ran into Portland harbor and cut out a schooner, so I took to my yacht and gave chase."

"I saw what course you took with your prize, but lost you in the storm."

"So I went to my island home, told my grandfather that I was coming in pursuit of you, and an hour ago I saw you leave your vessel and go into the interior of this island, so I awaited your return."

The man listened to her in silence, his face wearing a strange expression the while, and when she ceased speaking he again held forth his hands and said:

"Sweet Nell, I know that I am doing wrong; but let us be friends, for I have sworn in my heart that you could make me different."

"Shall we be friends?"

"Upon one condition."

"Name the condition."

"Will you do as I ask you?"

"Yes."

"Will you swear it?"

"I will."

"Then we will be friends," and she grasped his hand warmly.

"Now what have you there?"

"An iron box which I found by following the directions on a map, which I got possession of."

"To whom does it belong?"

"That you shall see, for I intend to open it and examine the contents."

"Would it be right?"

"Yes, when its contents may aid us in righting a great wrong that the person is now suffering under."

"Come, I will get an ax and break the hasps."

This was soon done, and the contents were seen to be papers that had an official look, a bag of gold, another of precious stones, and a number of miniatures safely packed away in a little wooden box.

What Island Nell beheld there caused her to start to her feet in great excitement and cry out:

"Oh, what does this mean?"

"Let us seek your grandfather, for he can tell us," was the reply of the young sailor, and half an hour after the yacht and the smack were flying under all sail toward Hermit's Isle.

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE SPECTER YACHT.

As the two little sailboats swept over the waters, on their way to Hermit's Isle, the Scud leading, Island Nell's quick eyes happened to catch the flutter of a sail far off, relieved against the dark outline of a small island.

Instantly she pointed it out to the young sailor, as he drew nearer, and, after a moment's consultation together they agreed to leave their direct course and bear down to see what it meant, for it was a strange thing to see a small craft in these waters.

The sail was fully four miles distant, and it was seen to be, as the two boats approached, close inshore.

"That craft is on a reef, Nell," called out the sailor, who had his glass to his eye.

"Yes, I just observed that; but I see no one upon her," answered Island Nell.

As they drew near they discovered that it was a cat-rig sailboat, and that she had run hard upon a sunken rock.

The sail was flapping listlessly about, but no one was visible upon her deck, or in the cockpit, as far as could be seen.

"I know the craft; it is one of Boatwain Knowl's pleasure-boats," called out Nell, and she put her helm down and ran alongside, while the moment after the young sailor did likewise.

Both gave a start as they beheld, crouching under the deck forward, the form of a man.

His face was haggard, his eyes wild and staring, his cheeks sunken, and he looked the picture of despair and fright combined.

"Oho! you are not specters, are you?"

"No, for one is a girl, and her cheeks are full and rosy."

"But I saw a specter craft! it sails these waters, and God have mercy upon the one at her tiller."

"Ha! young man, I know you well!"

"Ha! ha! ha! you do not know me now, for I am mad! mad! mad!"

"But it was the specter yacht that drove me mad."

"You see, I chartered this boat and sailed

away from Portland harbor to—to—to—ah, me! what did I sail away for?"

"I have forgotten; but I sailed away, and I got lost, lost among the islands."

"Then my boat capsized and I lost my stores and, oh! I am so hungry, for it seems so long since I have tasted food."

"Then I righted my boat and sailed once more; but I knew not where to go to find a port, and three nights ago it was, I think it was three nights ago, I saw a sail and ran down toward it."

"I hailed the one who held the tiller, but he did not answer, and then I saw that it was a ghost."

"The craft sailed about, hither thither, and chased me; it passed me, it doubled on me, and oh! I could not escape it, and so I went mad."

"At last I got away from the specter yacht, and I ran on this rock and here I am; but my brain is on fire with madness, and I am starved, so, good sir, for the sake of the past, give me something to eat."

"My poor fellow," said the young sailor, who had listened to the mad ravings in silence, while Island Nell seemed awed:

"My poor fellow, you shall have food, and at once," and Nell hastily placed victuals before him.

He seized and ate them ravenously, mumbling the while:

"I am mad, but I know my name."

"My name is Bronx, and I came from England."

"Yes, I came here on an important mission for Lord Brandon; but it is not accomplished yet, no, no, not yet; but it will be and I will get my pay."

"I will make Doctor Rowland pay, too, for I know all about his life, indeed I do, miss, and he is not what he seems to be, and he will pay me to hold my tongue."

"Gold buys tongues, you know, sir; but all will come well, if I do not see the specter yacht again; if I do I will die, I know I shall."

And so the poor wretch ran on until he had eaten all placed before him.

It was indeed Bronx, and he had become lost, after having run down the bay to search for Doctor Rowland.

What he had seen to unseat his mind neither the young sailor nor Island Nell could guess.

But they were determined to take him with them, and placing him in his boat, for the cat-rig was a wreck, the young sailor again followed in the wake of the Scud on the way to the Hermit's Isle.

As they sailed along the smuggler's cove madman many questions, which he asked in a listless kind of way for awhile, then lapsed into silence.

As darkness came on Bronx crouched down on the floor of the smack, and kept his eyes eagerly scanning the waters.

Rounding an island, suddenly a sail came in sight.

It was a small yacht and but a short distance away.

The moment his eyes fell upon it Bronx uttered a terrible shriek and springing upon his feet cried:

"The Specter Yacht!"

Then, with a wild shriek of terror he leaped into the sea and the waters closed over him.

"Ho, Nell! he has jumped overboard!" cried the young sailor and he luffed up sharp and lay to, while he quickly threw off his boots, coat and hat.

Some distance off he saw the man arise to the surface, and instantly he sprang overboard and swam toward him with bold strokes.

The madman saw him coming and swam away from him.

"Save him, sir! oh save him!" cried Island Nell, who had put her yacht about and came upon the scene.

"I will if I can," was the cool reply, and diving, the young sailor arose by the side of Bronx, who uttered a wild shriek and tried to free himself from him.

"Come, Bronx, my good fellow, return to the smack with me, and I'll show you that this Specter Yacht is a real craft."

"Come, old fellow," urged the young sailor kindly.

"No! no! no! release me, or you die with me."

As he spoke he threw his arms about the young sailor and they sunk together.

At once it came to the smuggler that he must release the grip of the madman, or he would perish with him.

In vain, however, he tried to do this, and finding his strength leaving him, he determined to act in self-defense.

Drawing his sheath-knife he drove it to the hilt in the breast of the madman.

Instantly the arms relaxed, and the young sailor arose rapidly to the surface and barely had the strength to draw himself on board the smack.

"Is he lost?" asked Island Nell in a low tone.

"Yes, I could not save him," he replied evasively, and then cast his eyes over the waters in search of the strange sail.

It had changed its course and was flying away.

"Come, Nell, specter or not, we must catch yonder craft," cried the smuggler, and at once the smack and yacht were put away in chase.

When brought thus in competition the yacht dropped the smack rapidly, and the smuggler called to Nell not to get too far away from him; but the girl was fearless and held on, and so closely did she pursue the strange craft over the dark waters, in its erratic course, for it was backing and filling, standing off and on, and then scudding away, that she at last came up with it and ran alongside.

The young sailor saw her lay the strange craft aboard, and then he heard what seemed like a startled cry from her lips, and immediately beheld the two boats separate, and the yacht coming flying toward him.

"What is it, Nell?" he cried, as she came within hail.

"A dead man is at the helm of yonder craft and it is Doctor Rowland's yacht Ruth," was her answer.

A short while more and the young sailor sprung on board the craft with its dead helmsman, and Nell followed.

Flashing his lantern in the face of the dead man Nell cried out:

"It is Jack Downes, the man whom I rescued from the breakers, and who called himself a Government officer."

"He came to our island with Doctor Rowland, and, when they set out to land in the skiff he ran off with the yacht, and has doubtless become lost, as many have before him in these waters."

"He has starved to death, seated at the tiller, for he could not swim, and could not run in to these islands."

Such was Island Nell's explanation, and without doubt the right one, for there sat Jack Downes at the helm, the tiller grasped in his hand, though it had come out of the socket in the rudder.

His head was drooped upon his chest, and in his white suit, it was no wonder that Bronx had taken him for a phantom helmsman, for those were days when superstition held full sway.

Dropping the body gently into the sea, the young sailor lowered the sail of the smack, and taking it in tow with the Ruth followed on in the wake of Island Nell once more, both of them impressed with the night of adventure they had known.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

ISLAND NELL'S COMPACT.

SEVERAL weeks have passed away since the discovery of the Specter Yacht, which had driven Bronx to madness and then to his death.

In that time the excitement in Portland had not lulled, for after the flight of the Indian Pirate that night, when she cut out the Prison Ship, and crippled the Barkaway, so that she could not follow her, the brig-of-war Breeze had been sent for to come up and hunt the outlaws out of Casco Bay.

In this service the Barkaway was to aid her, and Captain Dean, the handsome young commander of the Breeze made up his mind that he would not rest until the last pirate and smuggler had been destroyed that infested those waters.

In the preparations made to make the search and punishment most thorough, Doctor Rowland had greatly aided, for at his own expense he had chartered and fitted out a small fast-sailing sloop, capable of running in shoal waters where the Breeze and Barkaway could not go, and also hired the services of Bo'sen Knowls and his little yacht The Widow.

Upon the former he placed a crew of twenty men, and gave the Bo'sen a couple of men and Nat to serve under him, the boy carrying with him his parrot and monkey as assistants.

This little fleet of four vessels, armed, equipped and manned thoroughly, was getting ready to sail in a couple of days, when one afternoon Captain Dean and Lieutenant Mabrey were invited up to Rowland Manor to dine.

Just as dinner was over, and the party were adjourning to the piazza, the boatman of the manor came up and reported a sail in sight, and which was none other than the lost yacht Ruth coming into the harbor.

All was at once excitement, and going down to the pier the party watched the little craft as she came dashing along at a brisk pace.

"It is Island Nell at the helm!" cried Ruth excitedly.

"You are right, Miss Ruth," said Captain Dean, who, having been stationed for a long time in those waters, knew the fair Hermitess well.

A few moments more and the Ruth rounded to and glided alongside of the pier, Captain Dean stopping her headway and Doctor Rowland springing forward to help the maiden out.

Refusing his proffered hand, she sprung toward Ruth and warmly kissed her, after which she shook hands with Vivian Moreland, and said, utterly disregarding the presence of the gentlemen:

"You must pardon me, Ruth, for running

off as I did that night; but I had a motive in it, and I am so glad that I did do so.

"See! I have brought back your yacht."

"Yes, and it is a surprise to me, Nell; but where did you find her?" said Ruth.

"That is a story I came to tell Lieutenant Mabrey, but as I see Captain Dean here I will make my report to him."

"Yes, Miss Hermitess, I shall be glad to hear what you have to say, and thought that you had forgotten an old friend," said the handsome young captain pleasantly.

"No, I remember you; and I like you, for you are a brave and a good man," was the frank response.

"And am I to be slighted, Miss Nell?" asked Lieutenant Mabrey.

"No, I like you, too; but I do not know you very well."

"And father awaits recognition, Nell," said Ruth.

The girl turned toward him, and said, in a clear, cutting tone:

"Doctor Rowland, I do not like you; but for the sake of your daughter I will not be your foe, as you shall find."

Doctor Rowland's face turned deadly pale at this; but he made no reply, while the others seemed amazed at Nell's words, and Ruth looked pained.

But Island Nell left them no time for comment, for turning again to Captain Dean, she said:

"Captain Dean, some time ago Doctor Rowland, Lieutenant Mabrey and others came to Hermit's Island to search for Nick Burton and smugglers' booty."

"I refused to let them land, and they were wrecked by their boat dashing among the reefs."

"A man by the name of Jack Downes, a protégé of Doctor Rowland, was left on board the yacht, and ran off with it."

"Not knowing the waters he became lost, and not able to run up to an island or to swim, he starved to death at the tiller of his boat, and I found him there."

"This accounts for my bringing back the yacht Ruth; but I have more to tell."

"Another man, who came to this country on a special mission for some noble in England, was wrecked upon the coast one night, and I saved his life and that of a shipmate, the rest of the crew being lost."

"They came to this town, and the elder of the two went down the bay in a cat-rig boat, and losing his provisions, and not knowing how to find his way back, he began to starve, when one night he met the Ruth, with the dead man Jack Downes at the tiller and it drove him mad."

"I found him, too, but he was a maniac and sprung into the sea and was drowned."

"You doubtless remember the visit of the Indian Pirate to your port some weeks ago?"

"Well, he came here in chase of a craft known as the Prison Ship, and which was a schooner kept at the island rendezvous of the smugglers of the Chesapeake."

"That craft, the Prison Ship, he had reason to believe held his daughter, who had been kidnapped, at the time the Indian village of the Kennebecs was visited by pirates and its old men, women and children massacred."

"You saw upon the deck of the Indian's schooner Nick Burton?"

"What of him?" quickly asked Doctor Rowland.

Nell turned her eyes upon him and smiled. It was a meaning smile, and one which the doctor did not like, or any of those who saw it understand.

Without answering him she continued:

"You saw Nick Burton upon the Indian Pirate's deck, so let me explain that one day while cruising in the bay the outlaw known as Captain Paul the Smuggler was boarded by this same young man, whom you are so anxious to hunt down and hang, and he leaguely himself with the outlaws became their chief."

"That as such you, Lieutenant Mabrey, and Doctor Rowland can vouch that he spared your lives."

"You, Doctor Rowland, can vouch that he more than once spared yours."

"Well, some time after, he lay his schooner to one night near Bleak Rock Island, and went ashore alone in his boat, and for a special purpose."

"While gone the smuggler schooner was surprised by the Indian Pirate, attacked, and Captain Paul and his entire crew were massacred, for some of them Keno the Kennebec knew were the destroyers of his village, the slayers of his people."

"Heaven be praised that that man and his band have been wiped out," said Captain Dean.

"Just as the fight ended the smuggler chief, he whom you saw on the Indian Pirate's deck the other night, returned on board his vessel to aid his men; but he was recognized and at once made the white captain of the band of redskins."

"He accepted the position, and set sail for smuggler's island, to try and find the Kennebec's daughter."

"On the way there they picked up a smack in which were two smugglers, who reported that a Government war-vessel had attacked the island, captured the Prison Ship, and sent it under a prize-crew to Portland."

"Then it was that the Indian Pirate came on here and cut it out, while the smuggler schooner and little smack went to his island retreat to await his return."

"He arrived there with the Prison Ship as a prize, but not finding his daughter, set sail to continue his search for her."

"This time the white captain did not accompany him, but remained at the island and accomplished such good work that when the Indian Pirate returned, a few days ago, he was willing to make a voyage suggested by Nick Burton."

"Before the Indian schooner and her red crew departed on this voyage, it was arranged that the vessels at the island retreat should be surrendered to the American Government, and upon certain conditions."

"These will be to surrender the smuggler schooner, the Prison Ship, which you know is a schooner, and the prisoners held for ransom on board."

"Of them, men women and children there are eighteen."

"Then there will be two fishing-smacks, a cat-rig boat, and a large amount of booty."

"I will pilot a vessel to the island and give you full possession, Captain Dean."

"And how many prisoners?"

"Not one, for those held for ransom on the Prison Ship are in charge, while the two white smugglers are with the Indian Pirate."

"And that craft?"

"Has gone on a voyage, as I said."

"Where?"

"It matters not: but if you will promise a full pardon to those on board, she will in time be turned over to you, and more, with the craft, her guns and equipments, you shall have Burke the Buccaneer, if you agree to the conditions."

"Ha! do you mean this?"

"I do."

"But he was killed at the time of his action with the Indian Pirate."

"He was not killed."

"You are sure?"

"I am."

"And you will deliver him up with the Indian Pirate?"

"Understand me, Captain Dean, I will pilot you to the island and give you up the vessels I mentioned, and the prisoners held for ransom: also the Indian Pirate schooner and Burke the Buccaneer."

"Well?"

"In return you are to grant a free pardon to the Indian Pirate and those with him."

"This means Nick Burton."

"It does."

"And the smugglers with him?"

"It does."

"And the Kennebec and his braves?"

"Yes."

"Does Burton expect to be restored to his place in the navy?"

"He asks nothing at your hands."

"Then I take the responsibility and grant the conditions, for to get Burke the Buccaneer is worth alone the pledge."

"Give me this in writing, let Lieutenant Mabrey sign it as agreeing also to the terms, and Doctor Rowland, his daughter and Miss Moreland put their signatures as witnesses, and I will start within the hour with you for the secret island."

Captain Dean at once suggested an adjournment to the mansion, and the pledge was drawn up and duly signed.

Then the officers went on board the Barkaway accompanied by Island Nell, and that fleet sailed swiftly out of the harbor on her way to the island rendezvous.

Three days passed away and one afternoon a fleet of vessels were sighted coming up the bay.

The Barkaway was leading, and just astern of her was the smuggler schooner, with the prison craft in her wake, while astern were the smacks and the cat-rig boat.

Upon all were seamen from the Barkaway, and as they saw the town before them, the captives on the prison craft shouted with delight at their rescue, and the end of their long suffering in the hands of pirates.

CHAPTER XLIX.

LORD BRANDON AT HOME.

THE scene changes from the waters about Portland, to the shores of England.

It is a spot which the reader already has visited, for it is the elegant home of Lord Brandon, the stern-faced noble who started Bronx on his tour across the ocean in company with Sport, the reckless young gambler.

Two persons are seen riding on horseback along the shores of the sea, and seemingly enjoying the scene spread out before them of landscape and water.

They are well mounted and they sit their horses with easy grace.

The one is a man, the other a young girl, and their eyes rest upon a distant sail.

The man is the noble Lord Brandon.

The girl is one whose darkly bronzed skin and raven black hair denote foreign blood.

So dark indeed is her rich complexion, and so black her silken hair and eyes, one could not but see that she belonged to a race in whose veins no white blood coursed.

Her face was perfect in every feature, her eyes large, full of expression and hidden fire, and her form faultless, while her every movement was graceful.

She could not be over sixteen years of age, and yet her figure possessed the rounded symmetry of womanhood.

She was dressed in a dark riding-habit, a soft hat with waving plume shaded her head, and she held a whip daintily in one gloved hand, while with the other she reined back her impatient steed.

"Well, Fawn, to-morrow I will be alone again, as you return to school in the city, now that your vacation is over," said Lord Brandon.

"Yes, and I will be glad to get back, my lord, for though you are my guardian and most kind to me, I feel that I must devote the next year to hard study, for, when my school days are over, you know that you have promised me that I shall go to my native land, where dwell my people."

"Yes, I will take you there, Fawn, as I promised you I would, and, should you wish to remain, or find some young and handsome lover, you will make my heart very sad, for you are all I have in the world to love."

The young girl made no reply to these words, and the two rode on into the grounds of the Brandon estate.

It was sunset when they dismounted from their horses at the villa, and soon after tea was announced.

"Sing something for me, Fawn, for I feel strangely moody to-night," said Lord Brandon, as the two sat in the library after tea.

The girl arose and took up her guitar, and broke forth in a wild, weird song of a Spanish Gypsy.

After singing several other ballads she arose and said good-night, excusing herself as she had to pack up her things to return to school in the morning, for she had been spending the Christmas with her guardian, Lord Brandon at his villa.

Let alone Lord Brandon sat in his easy-chair, musing.

His face was still young and handsome, but seemed just as hard and stern as when the reader last beheld him.

"Strange that I do not hear from Bronx, or that he does not return, for he is long overdue," he muttered to himself.

"He cannot have failed me, for he loves gold too well for that."

"If he does, then I shall cross the seas and do what he fails to do."

"But I did wish to wait a year or so longer and then take Fawn with me as my wife."

"The girl is too young yet to know what love is; but she must marry me, as I am wrapped up in her."

"Well, Watkins?" and he turned to the portly butler who just then entered.

"A gentleman to see you, my lord."

"I receive no visitors, Watkins, as you know."

"He is none of the neighboring nobles or gentry, my lord."

"Ah, who is he?"

"A stranger, my lord, and he looks like a sailor."

"Show him in at once, Watkins."

The butler obeyed, and Lord Brandon arose as a young man entered.

"Ah! you are Sport, and I am happy to see you."

"Be seated, and there is wine at your elbow."

"Now, where is Bronx?" and the noble spoke hastily and nervously.

"Bronx is dead, sir," was the quiet reply.

"Dead?"

"Yes, my lord, I had to kill him."

"You had to kill him?"

"Yes, my lord, he went mad and tried to drown me, so I put my knife in his heart to save my life."

"This is remarkable, but—"

"Oh, don't be alarmed my lord, for I attended to all matters far better than he would have done, and I will tell you my story."

"I shall be delighted to hear it."

The young man then told the story of his run across, their landing upon the coast and digging up a tin box, and then of the storm, the lightning's stroke and the wreck, and how he and Bronx had been saved.

"But that tin box?" asked the Lord Brandon.

"It was saved, my lord."

"Thank heaven for that, for it contained most important papers."

"It did, indeed, my lord, for the papers it contained were legal claims to this estate, and your title, my lord, and they were recently buried there by the one who carried them to America, and who was the direct heir."

"Ah! you made this discovery?"

"Yes, my lord, and that you found out their

hiding-place from a map and papers which were got one night from a little stone cabin on the coast of Maine."

"I know all this, sir, so proceed with your story."

"I will, my lord: Well, after getting these papers, we went to work in the town of Portland to discover the heir, and end his career."

"As you know, my lord, he was an officer of the American navy, and you arranged with Bronx that he should cast certain suspicions upon him that would bring him to the gallows."

"You could have hired Bronx to put his knife in his heart, but you preferred to get rid of him in your own way, and thus bring dishonor upon him."

"And it was done?"

"Why, my lord, everything went well for us, for just as we got ready to act a rival officer of this heir came to the front to take his place on the vessel, and to cut him out with his lady love, and the two had a quarrel, and that night one of them was killed!"

"Which one?" eagerly asked Lord Brandon.

"The rival officer."

"And this fellow?"

"Was of course accused of the murder, even by the dying man, and was supposed to have taken flight to save himself from the gallows."

"Well, what became of him?"

"You see, he did not kill his rival, but Bronx, who was hiding near, seeing this heir returning to meet Lieutenant Reid, fired upon him and killed him."

"At the same time I, who was also near, rushed up with a couple of men and captured the heir, carried him on board a small craft we had in waiting, and set sail down the bay with him."

"Through the aid of the girl Hermit we found a safe hiding-place and landed him there with two keepers, who were to guard him."

"Why in Satan's name did Bronx not kill him?"

"Because I would not consent to it."

"You?"

"Yes, my lord, for, wild though I have been, I am no assassin, and I would not let Bronx kill him, as he wished to."

"And where is he now?"

"You shall hear, my lord, for I have come to tell you the whole story."

"I am certainly most impatient to hear," and the nobleman arose and lighted a cigar, chewing the end fiercely to control the emotion he felt, while his visitor was perfectly calm and smiling as he continued his story, to which another chapter will be devoted.

CHAPTER L.

SNARED.

"WELL, my lord," continued Sport, "having left the heir under guard, I returned to carry out my part of the play and lead all to believe that he had not only become a fugitive murderer, but also a pirate."

"I played my part well, thanks to the letters I had from the former chief to his pirate lieutenant, Captain Paul, and, as like the heir as though I was a twin brother, I was mistaken for him by every one who saw me, every one but Island Nell, and she read the secret."

"Curses upon her."

"No, my lord, do not say that, for she has been of immense assistance to me."

"My resemblance to the heir saved my life one night, when Captain Paul and his crew were slain by the Indian Pirate, and I played the man the red-skins mistook me for, until I had an opportunity of explaining without danger to myself, and also of making known to the chief something that he was very anxious to hear."

"Armed with the map you gave Bronx, I found the hiding-place of the iron box you left on Bleak Rock Island, and—"

"Did you bring it with you?"

"I did, my lord."

"I am glad, for I have most important family papers in that box, besides some jewels and gold."

"I have them all, my lord."

"You have done well; but pray continue your narrative."

"It will be soon told, my lord."

"The truth is I fell in love with Island Nell, and I determined, for her sweet sake, to lead a different life."

"So I told her the whole story, submitted to her the papers that were in the iron box, and went with her to the Hermits' Isle and her grandfather had a long talk with us, and we read over the papers that were in the tin box, and which Mr. and Mrs. Burton had buried long before, and then—"

"Great God! have you been treacherous to me?" cried Lord Brandon in a rage.

"Be calm, my lord, and hear me through."

"These papers proved who was the heir, as I said, to the title of Lord Brandon and these estates."

"They also told that Mr. and Mrs. Burton had had a little daughter, and one day, when it was but two years old, it got into a boat and went adrift."

"The parents believed it lost, and so mourned

it; but an old man, the Hermit, found the boat adrift and took the child to his home."

"This old man was a recluse, for he had been a smuggler, but gave up his lawless life and retired to an island to live alone."

"Loving the wee girl as he did, he reared her as his grandchild, when in reality she was no relation to him."

"All this came out as we three—Old Neptune, Island Nell and myself—sat talking in the old man's cabin."

"And more: it came out that the man I was plotting against was Island Nell's brother—Nick Burton, by name."

"Then we went together in her little yacht to the island where her brother was confined, and released him."

"Oh, God!" gasped Lord Brandon, as he lay back in his easy-chair without seeming power to move."

"Poor young Burton, my twin in appearance by a strange freak of nature, was haggard and emaciated."

"But we carried him to Hermits' Island, and then I brought there the Indian Pirate, and he was told all, while Nell went up to Portland to surrender the smugglers' vessels and to make certain terms, nominally for Nick Burton and the smugglers he had with him, but in reality for me."

"Having done this, Nell returned to the Indians' Island and delivered up the vessels, and then Nick Burton, the two smugglers and myself boarded the schooner of Keno the Kennebec and set sail for this country, for I remembered to have heard that you had a young Indian girl whom you were educating, and I so told the Indian Pirate."

"Now, my lord, you have my story; and I am accompanied by the Indian Pirate, who has come for his long-lost daughter who is now in this house with you, and Nick Burton is also with me, as he is here to claim his title and estates and to carry you, his treacherous kinsman, back to America to hang for the murder of his mother, for one of the smugglers with us saw you take the life of Mrs. Burton."

"As for myself, I am here to carry out the compact made by Island Nell with Captain Donald Dean of the American navy, and which was that I, the Indian Pirate and his crew, and the two smugglers with us were to receive full pardon for surrendering the vessel of Keno the Kennebec, and with it *Burke the Buccaneer—yourself, my lord.*"

At the last word, of the young sailor, the treacherous man, Gordon Burke, sprung to his feet; but a pistol confronted him, held in the steady hand of Sport, and into the room dashed a score of red-skin sailors, led by Nick Burton and the Indian Pirate, and the false noble, the daring Buccaneer was a prisoner.

CHAPTER LI.

THE GENTLEMAN PIRATE.

A MONTH after the capture of Burke the Buccaneer, in his elegant English home, a group of seven persons stood upon the piazza of Rowland Manor, watching with eager eyes the coming into the harbor of a rakish-looking schooner.

The group consisted of the master of the mansion, his beautiful daughter and Vivian Moreland, with Island Nell and Old Neptune standing near, while Captain Donald Dean and Lieutenant Calvin Mabrey who were also present had their glasses at their eyes, and were watching the coming schooner.

"It is the Indian Pirate, surely," said Captain Dean.

"Yes, and she flies the American flag," answered Lieutenant Mabrey.

The schooner soon after luffed up off the Rowland pier and dropped anchor.

Then a boat put off from her side, rowed by two white oarsmen.

In the boat besides were four persons.

These were the Indian Pirate, and the same beautiful girl, whom the reader remembers to have seen with the so-called Lord Brandon, and whom he had called Fawn, but who was in reality Wild Flower, as she was called by her father the Kennebec.

The other two were Nick Burton and Sport, and strangely alike were they.

Landing at the pier, the party, excepting the oarsmen, approached the mansion, and the welcome they received was a warm one indeed.

Then the story, as the reader knows it, was told to most attentive ears, and Nick Burton received the heartiest apologies from Doctor Rowland and the two officers for their doubt of him, for Ruth had never once believed him guilty, and her perfect trust had upheld Vivian Moreland's hope that he was innocent, and she said, warmly:

"You are repaid for your sufferings, Mr. Burton, in gaining so beautiful and noble a sister."

"I am more than repaid," he answered.

Then Sport, or, as he now introduced himself, Ralph Algernon, came in for congratulations for the part he had played, and the Indian Pirate and his beautiful daughter were cordially welcomed, while Captain Dean at once said that

a free pardon should be given to those who had offended the laws of the country, just as he had pledged himself it should be.

At the invitation of Doctor Rowland all became his guests for the night, and as he left the room to give certain necessary orders, Nick Burton followed him.

"Well?" said the doctor, nervously, for he saw that the young sailor wished to speak with him.

"Doctor Rowland, I am aware of your hatred for me, and your treachery toward me through all, and that I may escape in the future being dogged by your enmity, let me now say, sir, that I am aware of your past life.

"I am aware that you are but a *Gentleman Pirate!*

"I am well aware that you were the Surgeon Lieutenant years ago of Burke the Buccaneer, and that Old Neptune the Hermit knew you as an outlaw.

"You made your money by piracy, and, falling in love with one of your fair captives, you made her your wife, and she urged you to give up your lawless life.

"You did so, and came here, after the death of your wife in a Southern port, to make this your home.

"Knowing you as I do, I shall keep the secret from your daughter, and from all others, as long as you do not dog me with your hatred; but there are others who know the secret, Old Neptune, Nell, and Mr. Algernon, so beware not to prove yourself a traitor.

"Act right, and your secret shall not be known."

It is needless to say that Doctor Rowland pledged himself to be the warm friend of the young midshipman, especially when he knew that he was no longer Nick Burton, but Lord Burton Brandon.

CHAPTER LII.

CONCLUSION.

READER mine, my story is ended, when I have told you that Ruth Rowland became Lady Brandon in name, though her noble husband never claimed the title he inherited, preferring to be an officer of the American navy, and he made his home in Portland, where some of his descendants now dwell.

Vivian Moreland did not marry Doctor Rowland, for Island Nell broke this engagement, and the young lady became the wife of Captain Donald Dean, while at the same time Lieutenant Mabrey and Fawn the Kennebec Princess were wedded.

Nor was this the last marriage among the characters of my story, in whom I have tried to interest you, good reader, for Nell the Hermitess, having reformed Ralph Algernon, became his wife and they settled down in a handsome home on the shores of Casco Bay, and with them dwelt Old Neptune the Hermit of the Isle until his death.

As for Doctor Rowland, he became a changed man, and, no longer showing his hatred toward Nick Burton, no one, not even Ruth knew him as he in reality was, a Gentleman Pirate.

THE END.

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